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PATHAWAY;

OR,

Nick Whiffles, the Old Trapper of
the Nor'west.

BY DR. J. H. ROBINSON.

CHAPTER I.

THE SILENT TRAGEDY.

It was quite dark when the hunter reached the spot where he had set his traps the day before. It was one of those singular places that are found in the mountain-ranges only, shut out from the usual haunts of men by impassable barriers, and towering ramparts of earth and rock. But to the Northern trapper, all places are accessible. His practiced eyes find the thread-like passes, and his experienced hand unlocks the secret gates of the mountains. His feet are familiar with hidden paths; and the moss upon the trees, as well as the stars in the sky, direct his steps.

The hunter reached the inter-mountain solitude, to which we have referred, by a *cul-de-sac*, which he had believed was known only to himself; but, having recently lost several traps, which he had set upon a deep, narrow stream that watered the basin, and found its way out to a more open country, by some inexplicable way, his opinion in regard to the immunity of the spot from other human visitors had changed. He was not disposed to bear his losses without an effort to solve the mystery. He approached the margin of the dark stream not without a feeling of curiosity, which was soon changed to surprise, by the discovery that his traps were again missing. Having well assured himself of this fact, he searched, as thoroughly as the darkness would permit, for some clue to the authors of this mischief, but was unable to obtain the faintest evidence that the spot had been visited by a white or red man.

The trapper mused a while, and then concealed himself in the rank grass and weeds near the water, which, at that point, seemed to flow out of the mountains, from beneath an arching roof of solid rock. The hunter stretched at his length upon the soft verdure, listened to the murmur of the stream a long time, undisturbed, wondering where it came from, and how it forced its way through the flinty fastnesses of the ranges. The night grew darker. The blackness seemed to be rolled and compressed into the basin, till it resembled that Egyptian darkness that could be felt.

Presently a light flashed across the ravine. Startled at the phenomenon, the trapper looked for its cause and had made up his mind was a flash of lightning; when, upon the of directly opposite, he discov-

ered the solution of the mystery. Two persons stood there, holding brilliant torches over their heads, and endeavoring, by their light, to obtain a view of the stream below. These men were clad something like Mexican banditti. They wore the deer-skin hunting-shirts of the northwestern trappers, with plain leggings and moccasins. The larger of the two wore a red sash around his waist, with flowing, jaunty ends. Beneath this were thrust a brace of cavalry pistols, a dagger in a handsome sheath, a hunting-knife with a silver handle, and an ivory call of large size. He carried in his hand a double-barrel carbine. He was of medium height, thick-set, and the corporate members compactly knitted together. His head was covered by a skin cap. His features, as they appeared to the trapper by the light of the torch, were strongly marked, coarse, and hard.

His companion was of lighter make, but dressed much in the same style, with the exception that he wore a black leathern belt instead of sash.

The two remained there but a few moments, and disappeared as mysteriously as they came. This circumstance perplexed the trapper. It appeared to him that something out of the ordinary course of events was about to happen.

manifestly difficult and dangerous. For some ten minutes he watched the light moving eccentrically to and fro, sometimes totally disappearing, then flashing out clearer and nearer. Anon, they were near enough for the trapper to see that they were followed by four others, bearing a burden which looked like a human figure wrapped in a cloak. He instinctively drew himself further beneath the rocky arch that spanned the stream. The strange nocturnal visitors reached the bottom of the ravine, and the man with the sash led the way to the margin of the water, when the four men, in obedience to a slight gesture from him, placed their burden upon the ground, and fell back into a group by themselves.

The trapper began to feel an indefinable interest in the motionless object they had thus deposited. What was it? A human being? Was it dead or living? These questions were immediately answered. A young and feminine figure sprang up, casting aside the cloak that had enveloped her. The glare of the torches lighted up the rocky basin, and gave the hunter a full view of her person. Her face was pale as winter snow, and lovely beyond expression. The forester had never seen beauty of so high an order. It seemed to his rough and honest nature,

that an angelic creature had suddenly descended from the sky to thrill and awe him, for a moment, with her supernal charms. Her hair, long, dark, and shining, like wavy threads of jet in the torchlight, hung disheveled over her graceful neck and rounded shoulders. The symmetry of her person was marvelous. She gazed about her wildly, then cast herself upon her knees at the feet of the man in the sash. She threw up her arms, so white and beautiful; they waved to and fro—they beat the air in an agony of supplication. The trapper heard her cry: "Save me—save me!"

The words struck him like the thrusts of a dagger. He was tempted to rush forth and die in defence of such transcendent beauty. But they were six, he but one; he would wait. Providence would, perhaps, give him the privilege of doing something for that helpless and despairing woman. He had heard some one say, or he had read it, that Heaven's time was the hour of man's hopelessness. The trapper did not profess to be a religionist after the pretentious manner of fashionable Christianity, but he had the true instincts of the child of Nature, who, all un-

known to the world, spontaneously worships in spirit and in truth. Honest men do not entirely forget God in the wilderness, for he has placed so many mementoes of His presence around them that it is impossible to forget them.

The trapper's sympathies were terribly awoken. The fair supplicant took a chain from her neck, drew the rings from her fingers, and threw them at the man's feet. He gathered them up in silence, and dropped them into the



THE WOUNDED TRAPPER.

The faces he had seen troubled him. He beat a tattoo upon his forehead with his fingers, formed numberless conjectures, and grew more confident that the last was the furthest from the truth—a significant hint that those which might follow would be still less satisfactory. While he was thus cogitating, the torches appeared in another direction, slowly descending a steep and difficult pass on the same side, but lower down the stream. Their progress was

pouch at his side. She continued her entreaties; she attempted to take his hand, but he pushed her from him. Tired, apparently, of this scene, he looked significantly at the four ruffians in the background. They came forward, and laid their rough hands upon her. The trapper deemed such touch sacrilege, and it required all his self-discipline to prevent him from sending a bullet through the head of the author of this outrage. She ceased to struggle, and, abandoning all earthly hope, appeared to be addressing her prayers to Heaven. They bound her white arms behind her; the rigor of the cords wounded her delicate wrists till they were stained with little drops of blood. She was then muffled in the large cloak, in which was placed a stone of considerable size, and both made fast to her person.

The beautiful victim of these persecutions had already swooned, and was insensible to all these preparations. She was as motionless as a corpse, and as passive. The four mute men lifted the unresisting form, while the other two held their torches over the stream. While this was taking place, the trapper threw off his hunting-shirt, and divested himself of his arms except his hunting-knife. His heart was beating madly; the blood went racing tumultuously through his veins, while his swarthy brow was streaming with perspiration. He resolved to hazard all for the woman. Of her history, of the events that led to this tragedy, he knew nothing; but in his soul he believed her innocent of all crime, and undeserving the fate to which she was too manifestly doomed. Her sex, her helplessness, her wondrous beauty, appealed to him, and touched his heart as it had never been touched before.

The men carried her to the very margin of the stream, swung the motionless body to and fro for a moment, and cast it from them; it fell into the dark water—it sank—it disappeared from view. A few bubbles marked the spot where it went down. The man with the sash gazed a few seconds at the disturbed surface, then, waving his torch, turned from the place, and, followed by his accomplices, ascended, hurriedly, the rocks. All this was performed in silence; not a word had been uttered by the grim leader or his men. It passed before the eyes of the trapper like a horrible dream; but, shaking off the chilling impression it had produced he lowered himself quietly and quickly into the stream, with his hunting-knife between his teeth, and diving, swam to the spot where the muffled form had gone down.

He soon reached it, and with his knife disengaged the woman from the stone; then, grasping her with his left hand, struck out bravely with his right, still keeping beneath the surface. He was a hardy swimmer, but by this time he began to experience a terrible pressure about the chest. The waters hissed and roared in his ears, and the demand for air was imperative and painful. He arose near the bank with his unconscious burden. He gasped, he breathed, he was strong again. He sprang from the water and drew her after him. He had scarcely done this, when he heard quick footsteps on the rocks, and saw the gleam of a torch again. He threw himself down in the grass beside the immobile object of his solicitude. The assassin was returning to take a parting look at the stream, to see if his unhallowed work had been effectually performed. He lingered but a short time, and turned on his heel, the trapper thought, with an involuntary shudder. He was out of sight in a moment.

The hunter tore the cloak from the woman, and bore her to a drier and more sheltered spot. He chafed her temple, he rubbed her hands, and employed various other arts to bring her to consciousness. At first, a slight tremor of the body, then a sigh, assured him that his efforts were not in vain. A thrill of blushing life soon animated her peerless proportions. The beautiful eyes opened, the pale lips moved, and a gleam of intelligence illuminated the face. Evidently that portion of time that had elapsed since she had been thrown into the water and taken from it, was entirely lost to her apprehension. The horror inspired by the miscreants was still upon her and paramount. Again she stretched out those white arms for mercy, and uplifted those soft and pleading eyes. The movement deeply affected the trapper.

"You're safe, little woman—you're safe!" he exclaimed, earnestly. "The wretches have gone, and you're with a man who is ready to die for you! No more need of askin' for mer-

cy, gal; no more claspin' of them white hands in despair, no more turnin' of that pale face to heaven!"

The girl looked vaguely and incredulously at the hunter; her mind was disordered; and she could not quite comprehend what had transpired, and her situation. The one idea of deadly peril still absorbed and bewildered her.

"Look at me, gal! Recollect yourself. There's a friend near ye, who'll never desert you in the hour o' diffikilty. See! the monsters are not here! You have escaped their cruelty—you are free and safe! Heaven be praised, who would not allow such a deed of darkness! I've allers believed in Providence, and I believe it more nor ever to-night!"

The soothing tones and earnest words of the trapper acted like magic upon the girl. She began to understand; she saw a kindly sympathizing face bending over her, and the man, raising her tenderly, she pillowed her face upon his shoulder and wept like a child.

The trapper laid his large hand protectingly upon her pretty head, and passed his fingers carelessly through her wet tresses. There was magnetism—there was enchantment in the movement; the girl was reassured—she felt, she knew, that she was indeed safe, and seizing the sun-browned hand, kissed it and dropped tears upon it.

CHAPTER II.

THE CAPTIVE TRAPPER.

It was the vernal season in the mountains. The trees were in foliage; the stretching prairies were carpeted with green; and the winter snows had melted from the peaks of the ranges.

The trapper stood on a shelving rock, looking down into a deep valley below. In height, he was over six feet—rather slim—straight as an arrow—his muscles hard and seasoned with exercise. He wore the garb of the Northern adventurer and hunter. His face was pleasant and genial, though it had a few legible care-lines upon it. Nature had gifted him with one of those comical mouths which it is impossible to reduce to melancholy, but which will persist, in the most trying emergencies, in looking hopeful and brave. His deep-set eyes harmonized wonderfully with his mouth, having the same cheerful prestige. His rifle rested easily and gracefully across his left arm. His tall and motionless figure, standing in relief against the rocks, would have formed a pleasing picture for the painter, whose artistic eye, overlooking common-places, seeks the picturesque and the bold as subjects of inspiration.

The man—whatever he was, or whatever his history—had evidently met Life's vicissitudes with a manly front, and learned to endure, with a philosophical patience, misfortune that could not be averted. He was a nomad; his wandering nature was palpably written upon him. He carried with him, in some inexplicable way, the air of one who cannot remain at rest. Give him mountains, prairies, forests, and rivers, and keep him from cities and the haunts of civilized men, and he is at home, though his mighty camping-grounds are an hundred miles apart.

A dull sound crept up the ascent to the trapper's ears; it was like unshod hoofs upon the rocks. His hunter instincts at once became active. He descended the jagged side of the mountain, until he could command a wider view of the valley; then, posting himself behind a tree, watched for the cause of the noise he had heard, which was soon apparent. Five horsemen appeared, and approached the spot where he was concealed. Four of the parties were natives of the country; but the fifth was a white man, and a captive. As they came near, and drew opposite the trapper's point of observation, he was able to arrive at several conclusions in regard to the prisoner. He was a man considerably matured in life, and belonged, obviously, to that rough and roving class known as free trappers, who fraternize alike with the white and red races. It was plain that he had not been taken without a struggle—marks of which were palpable enough upon his torn and soiled hunting-shirt, not to mention a wound upon his face. He was minus the skin cap usually worn by people of his type—having lost it, doubtless, in the conflict that attended his capture. His

long, unkempt hair hung in matted masses over his face, giving it a dogged and morose expression—heightened, unquestionless, by the state of mind he was in. His hands were ashen at his back, with a rigor that gave him a foretaste of the tortures in reserve for him when his captors should reach their camp or village. He was secured to his horse, to make assurance doubly sure, by stout thongs of buffalo skin tied to his ankles, and passing under his horse's flanks.

It was easy to perceive that this wanderer of the wilderness was ill pleased with this arrangement; and the sullen manner in which he bore his reverses, indicated that patience was not among his prominent virtues. Two of his triumphant conquerors rode before, two behind him. The most important personage of the party kept a little in advance, and was clearly a warrior of distinction. His face and naked limbs were painted to the highest point of Indian fashion. His neck, chest and cheeks were bedeviled finely with alternate streaks of black, red, and white. His head was decorated with seven eagle feathers which told that he was of very high-caste, indeed—each feather representing a scalp that he had taken. In this particular, he enjoyed an enviable superiority over his three companions—one of whom could sport more than four of these tell-tale badges, while one of them displayed but two.

It was near sunset. The declining rays of the golden orb fell brightly upon captors and captive as they swept past the spot where the trapper was concealed.

"Liberty," muttered the latter, "is a mighty good thing, 'specially when the sun 's sh'nes, and natur' looks pleasant. Now that poor critter has lost his'n, and got into diffikilty. 'Them p'ison serpents' 'll take him to their village and burn him, as if he's a condemned Hottentot, or a heathen like themselves. The feller isn't 'tractive to look at, and has rather a hang-dog expression, I allow; but I don't like the idee of his bein' rubbed out afore his time comes."

A light footfall caused the trapper to change his position: a boy of thirteen or fourteen had approached him unheard, and was now near him. He was a youth to fix the attention of the observer immediately, and retain it. In stature he was small, with a personal development singularly delicate and graceful. His complexion was dark—his eyes large and dreamy—his feature wondrously regular and fair. It was evident that he was of mixed blood; but the somewhat dusky hue of his cheeks did not seem to impair his beauty. His hair was long, black, and curling. He wore a light, jaunty cap, which partially concealed his forehead. His neck was small, round, and delicately set upon the shoulders, which were feminine in their contour. His frock, which was of the finest and softest dressed doeskin, was ornamented with fringes of Indian needle-work. The sleeve, where it fell over the wrist, was wrought with bright colors in quills; while the hand below it appeared, by its smallness and delicacy, to be unacquainted with toil: those members had never been hardened with labor. His leggings and moccasins were of the same material as his frock, and of the same elaborate make. To look at, he was indeed a handsome youth. The only fault that could be found with him was, that he was too effeminate to fill one's idea of developing manliness; yet this defect did not inspire a feeling of contempt, but rather of admiration; for there was a spirit in the boy's eyes, and an expression about his mouth, that checked the rising impulse of scorn or pity. His figure was erect—his step elastic. There was a smile on his lips when the trapper turned toward him.

"Ah! it is you, Sebastian?"

"It is I, Nicholas. I saw you creep down the mountain, and observe something in the valley. Mountaineer, you have been muttering to yourself," replied the youth, in a clear, sweet voice.

"You have sharp eyes, lad. There's little to be seen that you don't see. You'd better heed my advice, and stick close to camp," answered the trapper.

"It's lonely at camp; besides, I don't like to lose sight of you, uncle Nicholas," returned the boy Sebastian.

"Lonely at the camp! Lonely with Misfortin and Smuggler—a brace of brutes that are as fond of ye as they be of fresh buffalohump. Bless your soul, lad! what better company do you want? Then it's so pleasant to

set at the camp-door and see Shagbark crop the tender grass, or give his heels an airin when his sperrits are up."

We must remark here, *en passant*, that "Misfortin" and "Smuggler" were two honest dogs—the steadfast friends and companions of the trapper—while "Shagbark" was the name of a favorite horse—an animal tried in a thousand tramps across the prairies.

"They are, no doubt, faithful creatures, but not quite equal to the mountaineer Nicholas, to whom I owe such a debt of gratitude—"

"None o' that, little un. I'll make a condemned diffikilty atween us one o' these days, if you don't stop pratin' about gratitude and sich like. Do you s'pose a rough feller like me ever did more nor his duty? Did you ever see an individooal that ever did more nor his duty? Did I ever? Did anybody ever?"

The trapper glanced skyward, sighed, and capped the climax by adding:

"O Heaven! no!"

"Bless your honest old soul!" exclaimed the boy, taking one of the trapper's large brown hands in his.

"Humbug!—for you are a humbug, and I shall call you so as long's you're with me. I don't take it kind of ye to call me old. Do I look as if there was an 'old soul' in this body? The Lord love you, no! If 'twas a thousand year old, there'd never be a wrinkle in it; for the Master of life, in givin' me a small intellect, balanced the account by a hopeful heart and cheerful disposition. I never see no trouble ahead, and don't borry none to make myself miser'ble with; though some of my family did nothin' but borry trouble, and died 'thout payin' it. But see! the dogs have missed ye; Smuggler's settin' on the brow of the plateau, with his nose in the air, while Misfortin is slowly creepin' down the slope. Go back, Humbug, and I'll jine ye presently."

"But you have not told me what you saw."

"Four redskins, with a captive white man—a free trapper, I should say. He was nigh about as dirty as an Ingin himself; but he'll be purified, as 'twere, by fire, afore long, I allow," replied Nicholas, thoughtfully. "But go you up with the dogs, and I'll foller ye arter I've looked at my traps."

"Traps! You are not going to look at traps, Uncle Nicholas; you're going to follow that party of Indians—I see it in your eyes. You pity the prisoner. But if you should be killed—if you should be killed, Nicholas—a sad day it would be to Sebastian DeLannay! What a terrible thing it would be to be left in the measureless wilderness without a friend!"

"My dear lad, you forgit the dogs," said the trapper, with a half smile, looking down benignantly upon the youth. "I'm glad, for the sake o' their feelin's, that they didn't hear ye make that remark. Why, Smuggler would eat his own tail with vexation; and Misfortin would be more onreconciled than ever to bein' a dog. Go up, I say, lad; don't be obstinate. You want to make me cross-grained and ill-tempered, don't ye?"

"You are brave, Nicholas, and it touches your feelings to see a fellow-creature in danger. I know well enough that you are about to expose yourself; you will risk your life for the captive trapper. Don't shake your head; I'm as sure of it as if I saw you on the trail. I'm goin' with you."

"What for? To hinder my movements; to make me too late to be of sarvice; to git yourself into diffikilty? I thank ye, little un; but I say, No! The man who follers a trail must go fast; he must pass like a shadow from pint to pint, and as softly as shadows go."

"I will obey you. But promise me," added the youth, with more earnestness, "that you will be very careful, and not deprive me of my only protector."

"I promise! Rashness and imprudence would be injustice to you. I won't run no risks if I can help it. I'll be wise as a serpent, and dangerous as I can. Call up the dogs, and don't let 'em foller me."

The youth turned reluctantly away; and, calling the dogs, with affected cheerfulness, slowly ascended toward the plateau; while Nicholas, after looking at him a few seconds, rapidly descended to the valley.

The sun was sinking to the verge of the horizon, and twilight mists were already purling in upon mountain-pass and defile. Having reached the fresh trail, he made a momentary halt, examined his rifle and equipments, tightened his belt, and resumed his way like a man who has made up his mind. That he was acquainted with that region, was obvious from

the manner in which he noted the landmarks. "I know nigh about where'll they'll go," he said, speaking to himself. "Bein' mounted, they'll be obleeged to foller the windin's of the valley; but I'll make shorter work on't."

The mountaineer no longer threaded the intricacies of the valley, but made a straight course across mountain-spur, meadow, and ravine. For two hours he held his way over a country rough and rugged, and inaccessible to inexperienced feet. Considerably exhausted, he reached the goal of his wishes. It was a spot lying between two mountains, watered by a small tributary of the southern branch of the Saskatchewan. On the eastern side was a narrow pass, half masked by rocks and bushes, leading to the Saskatchewan prairies, and the favorite hunting-grounds of the Blackfeet. Two horsemen could not ride abreast through this gate in the mountains. Through this inter-mountain pocket, the trapper Nicholas calculated that the braves would be obliged to pass with their prisoner, on their way to the villages of their people. It was here, near the water, that he resolved to station himself, and wait the appearance of the parties, who would come from the South, cross the stream, water their horses, make a short halt, perhaps, and leave the spot by the eastern pass. Acting under these impressions, Nicholas soon found a place of concealment behind a large moss-covered boulder, poised on a rounded point upon another beneath it. Hedges of mesquit and swamps of wormwood grew in the soil around it.

The night grew dark; it curtained the mountain-ranges sombrely. The dingle seemed like a deserted temple; the passes and defiles were mystic aisles; the craggy cliffs, dim and time-worn walls; the arching, starless sky, the dome.

The instincts of the hunter proved wonderfully correct. The sound of hoofs was presently heard by Nicholas—muffled and distant at first; clearer and nearer anon. The scenes and incidents of the wilderness do not affect the tried nerves of adepts in woodcraft as they do the novice, fresh and effeminate from the haunts of civilized men. He heard these signs of the approaching savages with equable pulse. Under certain circumstances, coolness is bravery; it enables one to grasp every advantage, and turn it to account.

The warriors entered the dingle, and approached the stream; while their dusky outlines looked like unsubstantial shadows reflected faintly upon the eye. They crossed the water—the very movement that the trapper had counted upon, and which brought them very near his place of concealment. After a few words of conversation in their own tongue, the Indians dismounted and held their horses by the bridles while they drank. The animal that bore the prisoner, frightened by some object, suddenly backed, until he stood to his girth in the mesquit and wild wormwood growing around the boulder behind which Nicholas was hidden. The warrior with the seven plumes, who was the leader of the party, gave little attention to this circumstance—the escape of the captive in that direction seeming wholly impracticable, as no one, however daring, could urge his horse up that rocky and nearly perpendicular ascent. To the trapper, this was a propitious moment. Providence, apparently, favored his intentions. The spectral shapes of the braves remained motionless by the stream. Nicholas emerged partially from the shelter of the boulder, drew his sharp-edged hunting-knife, and prepared to execute his bold purpose. But how should he announce his presence to the prisoner? A start, an exclamation, might betray him. He hissed like a serpent. The captive turned his head slightly, and Nicholas availed himself of the moment.

"Trapper," he whispered, "a friend is near. Be quiet."

These words, low as they were, reached the ears of the prisoner. He raised his head suddenly, and gazed around him like a man reviving from a trance.

"Hush!" added Nicholas, arising from the mesquit near the horse's flanks. The captive perceived this unexpected apparition, but controlled any emotions which his unheralded appearance excited. The Northern trapper is taught to be quick in his instincts by the dangers that continually surround him. Nicholas cut the thongs that bound him to the horse—then his knife passed quickly between his wrists: he was free! His deliverer silently placed a brace of pistols in his hands. All

this took place with a rapidity and adroitness that the clumsy inhabitants of cities cannot well conceive of. With a novice, such a feat would have loomed up a stern impossibility; but training and skill smoothed down the rugged surfaces of seeming impracticabilities.

Nicholas glided behind the boulder, and the captive trapper, slipping noiselessly from his horse, followed him. Instantly the war-cry of the Blackfeet rang through the dingle.

"Now, stranger, for a scramble among the rocks! Keep close to me, and I'll warrant we'll give the red heathen the slip. Fire when you have a chance, but don't waste your lead."

Nicholas sprang up the rocks like a mountain-goat.

"My limbs are summat cramped, but you needn't be afear'd but I can use 'em to good advantage," replied the other, hurriedly.

The Blackfeet were now pursuing them, whooping and yelling with disappointment; but the fugitives had the advantage of the first start, and, being used to the vicissitudes and perils of the mountains, felt little apprehension for the result. Several shots were fired after them; but they fell short, and spent their force on the rocks and bushes. In ten minutes, they had gained the top of the ascent; and, after breathing a moment, Nicholas led the way along the more accessible part of the country.

CHAPTER III.

THE MIMIC CITY.

Nicholas was curious to see the face of his companion, but the darkness prevented him from scanning his features; and it was not till the moon came up, an hour later, that he was able to satisfy himself in this respect. A closer view confirmed his previous impressions: he was of the wandering, free-trapper type, tinctured with Indian manners—addicted to most of the habits of that race, doubtless—with free-and-easy notions of life, and a hearty contempt for those outside of his calling. The countenance that he presented to Nicholas, lighted by the first rays of the ascending moon, was by no means calculated to invite friendship and secure confidence. The brow was low, and contracted into a perpetual frown. His eyes were sunken, heavy, and dull in expression; while the nose was broad and flat, and the mouth beneath wide, with a carnivorous air about it. The chin was short—the neck large—the shoulders broad. His garments were of the poorer sort, well worn, tattered, and greasy. His hair has already been mentioned as being in a rank state of nature—long, and matted over his forehead. In addition to this, the trapper was squint-eyed.

Nicholas internally concluded that his last adventure had not made an important acquisition to the number of his friends; in short, he was not inclined to be pleased with him. His manner of talking was abrupt, short, and jerking—giving one the impression that his words and sentences were discharged from a catapult or battery. He had a peculiar way, too, of grunting between his sentences, that was not charming.

The hurry of the flight and the darkness had caused Nicholas to deviate from his intended course. He now found himself on a considerable eminence, surrounded by scenery that was really wild and picturesque. Casting his eyes eastward, he beheld what appeared to be the ruins of a great city. This appearance was produced by far-stretching and high-piled masses of rocks, that shaped themselves into dark walls, tottering towers, and broken columns. This mimic city covered the sides and summit of a mountain, and at last, with its grand and gigantic scenery, was lost to view in a deep and dark valley.

In all his wanderings, the trapper had never beheld a sight more worthy of attention. He was contemplating it with a rapt sort of wonder, when he was addressed by his companion:

"Terbaccer, eh? Chaw, stranger?"

Nicholas turned, and met the heavy eyes of the questioner.

"You want some o' the weed, I allow, and I'm most allers able to 'commodate in that line, though I'm not powerful fond on't myself. Mister, I should say you'd been in a condemned little diffikilty!" answered Nicholas.

"Diffikilty, eh? 'Tisn't the fust time, stranger; reckon 'twon't be the last. 'Spect

sich accidents in the wilderness. Git used to everything, you know, arter a while."

The free trapper stopped, and filled his mouth from the pouch which Nicholas tendered him, then rolling the narcotic mass into his right cheek with his tongue, added:

"I observed you war lookin' at that heap o' rocks. We call it the haunted city."

"We? Who?" asked Nicholas.

The man hesitated, then stammered:

"Why, we free trappers, to be sure!"

"I wasn't aware," replied Nicholas, "that folks went trappin' 'mong the rocks. I ginerly set my traps in the valleys, on streams, and lakes."

"In coorse; but one can't help seein' a mountain o' rocks like that, if he's anywhere in the neighborhood on't. But I'll tell you that it isn't a place of good repute. People o' my craft usually give it a wide berth. Lonely trappers and hunters have suddenly disappeared in the vicinity of Haunted City."

Nicholas shook his head incredulously, and the trapper went on:

"Noises have been heard there like discharges of artillery. The Ingins say that the Thunder Spirit lives there. Have heard mysterious rumblin's there myself. There's a deep valley away yonder, called Lost-Trapper Valley. We call it Trapper Valley for short."

"Who named these places?" asked Nicholas, looking sharply at his companion.

"Every place must have a name, you know," he replied, somewhat perplexed again. "One place is named from one circumstance, another from another. I happen to know about 'em, 'cause I've camped a good many times at Otter Creek—which, I reckon, can't be more nor five or six miles from here. By the way, stranger, I allow you oughter have a name yourself?"

The trapper looked at Nicholas inquiringly.

"You're right, mister," returned the latter, "I have plenty o' names, and I don't know as I'm ashamed of any of 'em. The Ingins, 'cording to their heathenish notions, call me Doubledark, having somehow or other got the idee that I'm shy and crafty, which is a mistake o' theirs. The fact is, I'm neither dark nor deep, but transparent, as 'twere, and easy to see through. As for bein' double-faced or double-natured, I ain't. I don't carry two faces—I never did—I can't. Oh, no!"

Nicholas took a long breath, and let it out slowly, with the air of a man who feels that injustice has been done him.

"Doubledark!" repeated the other, with a mocking laugh. "You don't look like it, eh? But what's your white name? I don't care much about red titles."

"There's a name that I used to be called by, but sence it's got down into the settlement, and been talked over a good 'eal by folks that I don't know nothin' about, I ain't forrard 'bout mentionin' it to strangers. The truth is, that I've been writ up in the papers by idle people that hadn't nothin' better to do—and I don't jest like it. I'll make a pison diffikilty 'mong 'em, if I ever git down as fur as the clearin's. I never 'spected that things would come to sich a pass. I s'posed I should be left to live and die in peace unmolested on the peraries, with my gun and traps by my side, and my dogs and hosses around me. But we ain't sure o' nothin' in this world but diffikilty, and that we can count on with some sartinty. They tetched me in a tender p'int when they put me in print, and doubted the traditions o' my family."

"If you're goin' on in this way, mister, you may as well drop the subject, for you'll never git at the question I asked ye. As for print in' and all that sort o' nonsense, I never trouble myself about it, and can't read a word if it's printed never so well."

"I'm a modest man," resumed Nicholas, though I have my peculiarities. All I want is, to be let alone."

The speaker brought his rifle down upon the ground emphatically, and added:

"Nick Whiffles wants to be left alone—left alone to tell his stories, to have his joke, to live out his own life in his own way. Oh, yes!"

The free trapper fell back a little, chewed his quid violently, ran his eyes up and down Nick's tall figure, and said, presently, in a voice thickened with tobacco juice:

"So you're Nick Whiffles? Guess so! Pooty likely!"

"What am I to understand by that?" demanded Nicholas, tartly.

"That I'm not a woolly sheep!" answered the trapper, with a grin.

"I don't git at your meanin' yit, precisely. Be a little more plainer, if 'tisn't too much trouble," continued Nick, quietly.

"Don't throw dust in my eyes, and I won't wink!" said the trapper, with provoking coolness.

"I don't like to have a man begin my 'quaintance by doubtin' my word," responded Nick, with warmth. "If you can't believe a person when he tells you his name, you must be a faithless critter; and I calculate that we can't hitch hosses together, nohow. I a'n't quarrelsome, but I want to be believed when I'm tellin' the simple truth. The Lord knows that I a'n't proud o' my name; and for the reasons I've give, should very well like to forget it. But if you doubt my veracity, I'm afeard there'll be a diffikilty atween us."

"You threaten, eh? Goin' to scare me, a'n't ye? Come now, that's good, Mr. Doubledark, Darkdouble, or Doubledark, I shall knock under right away. Uh!" The trapper finished his remarks with a grunt that might have honored a grizzly bear.

"Before we go any further, I should like some kind of a handle to handle you by!" said Nick.

"Take Jack Wiley, and handle me by that; and ruther keerfully, too, for there's some glass in me, and I may break with rough usage."

"Glass, and brass, too!" muttered Nick.

"Jes' so, if you like it. As for Ingins nicknames, I a'n't a whit behind any free trapper in the country, but have got as many and as long. Some call me the Medicine-Calf."

"Should like to hear ye bleat, Mister."

"One tribe calls me Two Hundred Hosses, because I run off a drove o' hosses of jest that number, one night, from their camp. But come, I don't feel disposed to quarrel with a man who has done me a good turn, even if he does undertake to gammon me a little."

"Well, be it so; but if things hadn't been as they are atween us, I'd made you believe that the moon was made of buffalor-humps, and you'd roast a slice on't on a stick. But, come on, Jack Wiley, let's folier this ridge."

"It'll take us ruther too near the Mock City to be altogether agreeable!" returned Wiley, as Nick moved onward.

"That's clear Ingins," said Nick. "White men never ought to git sich notions into their heads. I've heard o' this rocky city afore, but never believed there was anythin' onnatural about it, less a mountain-sheep or a poor root-digger are sunthin' out the common course."

"I don't pertend to be any wiser nor my neighbors, and shall speak only for myself; but I shall give Trapper Valley and that mountain a wide berth. It's said that them that enter Trapper Valley never find their way out, and a'n't never heard on ag'in. The Ingins think the place enchanted by a bad spirit, and that everybody, who unfortunately gits into it, becomes immedately lost, and is doomed to wander up and down, looking for a way out all the rest of his days. You needn't shake your head; I tell ye they've been seen there, Mr. Doubledark."

"Well, I won't dispute the p'int, though I never 'spected to see anythin' worse nor I am wherever I may go. I never could see sperits myself, but I had a niece that could see 'em in quantities to suit customers. You've heard o' my family, I allow. There was my gran'-father, the traveler, and my uncle, the historian, that were uncommon in their line o' business. I know that folks have shook their heads and laughed in their sleeves, as 'twere, when I've mentioned their expl'ites, which I have, occasionally, to keep their memories green."

With this kind of conversation to beguile the way, the parties kept on till they reached a spot where they could command a fuller view of the Mimic City, which, looming up spectrally in the moonlight, looked weird and solemn.

"Down yender," said Jack Wiley, pointing, "where you see the rocks piled high, is the entrance to Lost Trapper Valley. It is called the Devil's Gate. Havin', as I told you, trapped at Otter Creek, Beaver Springs, and Black Rock, I've picked up these stories from one and another that I've come across in the way o' business."

"You interest yourself more about sich things nor I do. Give me good trappin' and huntin'-ground, and I won't trouble myself about the superstitions of the Ingins and ignorant white men."

Nick suddenly paused, then added, in a different tone:

"Jack Wiley, look there, among the rocks, and see if them is some of your hobgoblins!"

"Where—where?" demanded Wiley.

"Don't you see 'em movin' silently 'mong the rocks?"

"Yes, I do; and we'd better be goin', 'less we should see somethin' worse!" responded Wiley, hurriedly.

"You can go where you please, Mr. Two Hundred Hosses; but my eyes was give me for sarvice, and I shall use 'em."

Nick's attention had been attracted by the discovery of several persons gliding among the rocks in single file. They were not so far distant, but he could see them very plainly. Their garments and manner of walking intimated that they were white men, although Nicholas could not positively affirm them to be such. He counted five, and the foremost wore a red sash about his waist. He could see their weapons gleam in the moonlight. Instantly his mind reverted to the scene that had transpired in the little basin, when trying to discover the person or persons who had stolen his traps. A singular train of thought was at once awakened. He watched with an interest not easily described, the progress of the five figures, while Wiley stood sullen and silent beside him. Nicholas did not speak. Resting his right arm upon his rifle, with a kind of quiet abstraction of manner, he followed with his eyes the movements of the parties among the mimic walls and fragments of the haunted city. They descended to the bottom of the valley, and were lost to view near the Devil's Gate. Jack Wiley, during this time, was observing his countenance closely.

"What do you think on't?" he asked, abruptly.

"That it's not an uncommon thing to see trappers in this part of the country!" answered Nicholas, drily.

"Not sich as them—not sich as them!" muttered Wiley. "I've one piece of advice to give you, stranger; and I do it out of gratitude for the good turn you've done me: Shun Trapper Valley, the City of Rocks, and the country hereabout, as you would a war-party of Blackfeet, or the plague, or the pestilence, or anything that's dangerous and to be feared."

"I thank ye, Jack Wiley, for the warnin'; but I'm not afeard of man or goblin. I've walked the woods, and mountains, and prairies many years, and there's no place that I fear more nor another. All spots atween Columbia River and Hudson's Bay are alike to me. I know the haunts of the wolf, the grizzly, the panther, and all the destructive animiles of this region, as well as all the villages, trampin', campin', and huntin'-grounds of the red pison serpents; and I go to and fro as one who understands his craft, and has taken the measure of his compacity to meet circumstances and govern 'em."

Nicholas uttered these words with decision; and shouldering his rifle, resumed his way with the firm step of one who has confidence in his own judgment and foresight.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GRAY HUNTER.

The youth—Sebastian Delaunay—having reached the plateau, entered a small hut hidden in a growth of cotton-wood. The dogs followed him, looking back, occasionally, in the direction their master had taken. A fire was blazing in the centre of the hut, beside which he seated himself. For a while he beguiled the time by adjusting feathers to the shafts of some arrows, while his canine companions, stretched at his feet, observed his operations with half-closed eyes and sleepy good-nature. Wearying of this employment, and anxious for the return of Nicholas, he took down an Indian long-bow that hung against the wall of the hut, and after stringing it carefully, buckled a well-filled quiver across his shoulders, then made his way to the spot where he had parted with the trapper. It was dark; but the dogs, taking the scent of their master, ran along before him, thus guiding him to the valley. Like a sleepless sentinel, he kept faithful watch upon the cliffs until the moon came up, sometimes talking with the dogs, at others, musing.

Suddenly, the dog, Smuggler, erected his ears and pointed his long nose down the valley, which was now faintly silvered over with the moonbeams; his four-footed associate

growled and started to his feet, and would have bounded down the mountain-side had not Sebastian restrained him.

The youth was well enough acquainted with the habits of the dog to know that he had seen or scented either man or beast; but it was in vain, however, that he taxed his powers of vision to see any animated thing. A cluster of dwarfed pinon farther down the declivity, within a few rods of the bed of the valley offering a better and more sheltered point of observation, he descended to it.

The advantage of this movement was immediately manifest; for, straining his eyes southward, he beheld a figure approaching. It was a white man, but evidently not Nicholas—there being a palpable difference in height and garb, apparent even at that distance. Sebastian regarded his advance with a singular feeling of curiosity. He was young—he judged by his elastic step, and straight, lithe form. As he drew nearer, he perceived that his garments were of coarse, gray stuff, differing materially in cut and fit from those of the hunter and trapper—showing, perhaps, that he was fresher from the haunts of civilization. Of his features and complexion, the youth could form no opinion—and it was only when the moon's silver rays fell upon him, that he could arrive at conclusions respecting his garb and equipments. His arms consisted of a two-barreled carbine, slung to his back by a strap. Beneath a plain leather belt he wore the indispensable hunting-knife, and the ever-convenient pistols with which writers of fiction provide their heroes, brigands, and adventurers.

Though alone, and in the heart of a savage country, the young hunter (we will call him such) looked brave and self-reliant—at least, so thought Sebastian, whose attention was now solicited in another direction by Smuggler, who erected his ears, pointed his nose, and displayed a strong inclination to dart off up the valley. With a hand upon the head of each, the youth subdued them, at the same time making an effort to discover the cause of their additional excitement. Immediately the youth saw what affected him very much—three men dressed in a wild, uncivilized manner. In their outward persons, the roving trapper and the fierce and predatory Indian seemed to be united, with an ingenuity and effect that rendered them more unique and startling than either, alone. They advanced in silence, while Sebastian, for some reason, regarded their coming with pale face and trembling limbs. Crouching between the dogs, and winding an arm around the neck of each, he gazed at them with nearly suspended respiration, and with a countenance upon which terror, incertitude, and dismay were dominant. Gone was the sprightliness and buoyancy of the youth—but his fears appeared not the common, abject promptings of cowardice, but a sudden horror inspired by some dread mysterious power.

Sebastian glanced, shudderingly, toward the young hunter—he had stopped and unslung his carbine. The parties had discovered each other and at the same instant. What would they do? Would the meeting be friendly? Sebastian Delauney believed not. He of the gray frock also had his doubts. It was true that the three persons looked like white men and free trappers—but their prestige was more savage than that of the native inhabitants themselves. It is easy to be suspicious. Sometimes one's intuitions warn him whom to shun, and admonish him where confidence should stop.

The foremost of the three hybrids, after staring at the man in gray a little while, drew off a fantastic skin cap, with the tail of some animal attached; and, after scratching a bristly head with a hand that looked like the paw of a grizzly bear, yelled like an Indian. The other, not replying to this salutation, he said:

"Hillo! hillo, there, my *mangeur de lard*!"

"No more a pork-eater than yourself!" replied the hunter in gray.

"Don't be impudent, *mon garcon*. We was born on the peraries a half grizzly bear, half panther, half French, and half Injin. Wa! wa!"

The gray hunter threw his carbine across his left arm, with his right hand on the lock, and the other on the guard.

"I'm a peaceably-disposed hunter. I meddle with no man's business, and only ask the simple privilege of being let alone. I'm not so young and inexperienced as to be terrified by bravado and bluster, but am willing to meet

every honest person on a friendly footing, be he white, red, or mongrel, like yourselves."

One of the trappers growled derisively, like a bear, while a second howled like a wolf, and the third crowed like a farm-yard chanticleer.

The young man's temper was evidently yielding.

"If you think it is becoming to meet a stranger and a white man in this manner, I must beg leave to differ with you. Your conduct is both insulting and rude; and therefore, good-night!" he said, tartly.

"Not so fast, *mon garcon*! We have business with ye."

The speaker advanced toward the gray hunter, with a leering, insolent expression.

"Stand back! Don't come too near!" he said, pointing his carbine.

While this was transpiring, Sebastian Delauney looked on with a fixed and stony intensity. He had not changed his position—he still crouched between the dogs, upon one knee, with his arms about their necks and his hands upon their mouths. He lost not a word that passed, nor a movement.

"Perhaps you don't know, youngster, that my name's Grizzly Bear. I'm death on all small game that dares step in my way; so put down your pop-gun, and we'll decide your case for ye, presently."

"I propose to take care of myself. I trust no such villains. I warn you to look to yourselves, for I'm not the man to be brow-berten—robbed, perhaps, with impunity!"

The Grizzly Bear scowled, menacingly. The natural malignity of his disposition was being aroused.

"Stranger, did you ever hear of Bill Brace?" he asked, in a voice in which anger was beginning to show itself.

"I may have heard of such a knave, but do not now remember," answered the hunter, boldly.

"I'm Bill Brace!" added the trapper.

"Perhaps you'll do me the honor to introduce your companions?" retorted the hunter, with a sneer.

"You'll soon know 'em well enough, I'll warrant. This feller, who can eat a raw mule for his dinner, is Ben Joice; and this chap, who can swallow a quart o' raw whisky at once, is Zene Beck. I don't think you'll ever tell our names at any of the tradin'-posts or settlements!"

There was something notably sinister in the manner in which he uttered the last sentence—pertinacious perverseness, a sullen depression of the facial muscles. Pride of strength made him insolent. Bill Brace was one who believed in the invincibility of his own muscles. Lawless by inclination and habit, vicious and aggressive by nature, he was in want of that wholesome rebuke that tames the ruffian and humbles the brute-man.

"Men," said the young man in gray, "if you will tell me your purpose, I shall know better how to meet you. If your intention be robbery, I shall be no passive subject of such an outrage. I have seen men of your type before; most of them have been peaceable and well disposed; and, I can assure you, those who were otherwise gained nothing."

"Throw down your weapons!" vociferated Bill Brace.

"Yes, down with your weapon!" repeated Ben Joice.

"Down with your two-shooter!" said Zene Beck, in a threatening voice.

The hunter's figure grew more erect and defiant. His countenance, so mild in expression a few moments before, was now firm and resolute.

Bill Brace laid his hand upon the handle of a formidable bowie-knife, and advanced his right foot. The hunter cocked his carbine.

"Look you, fellows! There are three of you opposed to one. The first man of you that makes an aggressive movement, I will shoot as I would a turkey-buzzard. I hold you to be outlaws, adventurers, vagabonds, and not true men. If you wish a quarrel, I will meet either one of you on fair and equal terms, whether it be with rifle, pistol, knife, or the weapons which Nature has provided."

Bill Brace elevated his burly shoulders, and laughed scornfully; but there was more anger than merriment in the demonstration.

"You crow loud for a cock fresh from feather-beds. Tryin' to imitate the giniwine game, ain't ye? Goin' to scare grizzly-bear eaters, I reckon. You'll fight Bill Brace, will ye?"

The fellow stood with his gun before him, the breech upon the ground, both hands upon

the muzzle, his body bent, and his bearded, dirty chin thrust forward. Never was the demon of the perverse and insolent more palpably pictured. Dwelling afar from the restraints of civil law, cut loose from all the forms and conventionalities of society, following his own wayward impulses unchecked and unquestioned, pampering his wild appetites, aping Indian habits—their vices, not their virtues—with full faith in his brute powers, he had developed into a full-grown ruffian of the savage and uncivilized sort. Backed by kindred spirits, with no moral curb upon his passions and desires, he believed that he was not only a law unto himself, but to others.

The gray hunter, though taller, was of lighter build. He had more symmetry, and less prominence of muscle. The individual would have been hypocritical who faulted his proportions. His configuration gave promise of quickness and suppleness; but his frame did not appear of sufficient hardihood to contend with the muscular insulter before him. But Sebastian observed that he was cool and steady, unshaken by the usually attendant trepidation of anger and danger.

"Do you hear it, Ben Joice, and you, Zene Beck? This soft-bearded—this tender infant—this *pulin' mangeur de lard* will meet Bill Brace with any weapons, from his fists to a blunderbuss!"

In a paroxysm of comical, yet inexpressible contempt, Brace plucked off his fur cap by its swinging tail, threw it upon the ground, and trampled upon it, while his companions manifested their admiration in various ways; one by thrusting two fingers into his mouth, and whistling through them—the other, by doubling himself up, and pretending to be struggling with irrepressible laughter, of a nature the most ludicrous possible.

The gray hunter remained perfectly tranquil, with his carbine still in a position to be instantly available.

"Milk-drinker, I take that challenge! He, he! ho, ho! Jest think on't, boys; he's goin' to tackle Bill Brace, the raw catamount-eater—the double-barreled bully of the Saskatchewan!" Then, to the young man: "Jes' say how you'll go out the world, mister, and it's done! Will ye have lead, or steel, or grizzly-bear paws, which is the nateral weapons, as you call 'em?"

"We'll begin with the weapon's of Nature; then, if you are not satisfied, the bowie-knife shall decide who is to be buried in this valley!"

"As for that matter, I can tell y' beforehand. We don't take the trouble to bury folks hereabouts; the wolves are the undertakers in the mountains; they make short work on't, and nothin' to pay for grave-diggin' and sarvices. But we're wastin' the precious time. Say your prayers as quick as ye can, and I'll swallow ye!"

"Moderately, moderately, my double-barreled ruffian! There are conditions to this duel; the arms of yourself and friends must be deposited by that cluster of pines; then your comrades must withdraw to yonder rock, and remain passive spectators of the contest, let it turn which way it may. As for myself, I will place my weapons by this tree behind me where I can easily get at them in case of treachery and bad faith."

To this proposition Brace at first objected, but finally assented; and the weapons of the party, after some delay, were disposed of as stipulated by the hunter. Sebastian held tightly upon the muzzles of the dogs while this part of the business was being performed; for the arms were deposited within a few yards of his hiding-place. Smuggler rebelled a little as Ben Joice drew near, in the discharge of this duty, and the dog Misfortune actually growled, as if his name was ominous; but the sound did not attract attention.

Beck and Joice retired to the spot designated, which placed several yards between them and their arms, and about the same distance from Brace and his antagonist. The former cast off his hunting-shirt, and bared his stalwart arms, like a man who wishes to get at his work as soon as may be; while the latter, having laid his gun, pistols, and hunting-knife at the roots of a cotton-wood, deliberately divested himself of his gray frock, and tightened his waist-belt. His lithe, symmetrical figure was now displayed, in striking contrast to the stout and unshapely proportions of Brace, who, to all outward appearance, had a physical superiority, weighing at least a hundred and eighty pounds, while the weight of the other could not exceed a hundred and fifty pounds.

"Stranger," said Brace, with mock seriousness, "you'd better tell me your name before I devour you; as some of your friends may want to set up a stone over your bones if they should chance to hear what kind of an end you made!"

"Should I be assassinated here by you, or yonder cut-throats, an adventurer by the name of Pathaway will be missed among the mountains. Are you ready, Bill Brace?"

"All ready!" responded Brace.

"Then come on, and get what you have long deserved!"

The young man advanced his right foot and arm, then the left with the corresponding arm, and "dressed up" to his antagonist. His right arm was now drawn back like a bent bow, his left hand forward, while his eyes were fixed steadily upon those of Brace, who came on with a great flourish, intending to bear down his antagonist by mere force of muscle. He led off with his right, and received a return in his mouth with Pathaway's left. It was at once evident that the latter understood the art of self-defence, while the former was ignorant of its advantages, confident that brute strength was all that was required in an encounter of that nature.

"The youngster's drawn the first blood!" cried Joice. "Look out for him, Bill!"

Surprised at this rebuff, Brace fell back, and noticed that his beard was changing its color from dark to red.

"Time!" shouted Joice, derisively.

At the second round, Brace advanced more cautiously, manifesting an intention to end the matter by one crushing blow. He led off with his right again, when Pathaway cross-countered, and gave him a heavy fall. Joice and Beck greeted this event with noisy laughter, thinking that their champion was "playing off," in order to come off with more honor by-and-by, when he had tampered with the youngster long enough to suit his purpose.

"Get up, Bill; what are you tumblin' about in that way for?" said Joice.

"There's a good 'eal of 'possum in Bill," observed Beck, hopefully.

"Yes, indeed! he'll peg into him by-and-bye. He'll whip that youngster till he won't know the moon from a fire-bug!"

Bill Joice was now in a furious passion. He sprang at Pathaway, roaring like a buffalo-bull. He struck right and left; his arms swung about like flails, always striking the air—never his antagonist—who, dressed under those active members to the left, to the right, planting his blows wherever he pleased. Joice called "Time" again, and the bully was evidently glad to rest. He scanned his more youthful antagonist from under his depressed and heavy brows, with mingled ferocity, malice, and amazement. He wondered what had become of his own strength, and on what object his hot wrath had fallen. He mouthed and scowled on Pathaway, with the swelling fury of a baffled and tantalized beast of prey. The man who had given the somewhat unique name of Pathaway, maintained his calmness, and, with his arms folded upon his breast, met the flaming glances of the ruffian trapper, unmoved.

Ben Joice and Zene Beck unconsciously drew nearer; they were becoming deeply interested in the contest. Sebastian, too, fascinated by the exciting spectacle, raised himself to obtain a better view; and the dogs, equally sympathetic, arose upon their haunches.

Brace, panting like a steam-engine, with a startling oath, dashed again at the hunter, who, passing under the belligerent arm, plunged his left like a bullet under his right ear. Brace fell like a bullock in the shambles—got up in a flurry, striking more wildly than ever. Now, for the first time, the gray hunter began to show his marvelous power; he aimed his blows with a skill that was never baffled, and the face of the bully was soon reduced to a pulpy and unsightly mass. The blood rained down his beard, and reddened his broad and heaving chest. He fell every moment, and scarcely had strength to rise, while the small fists of Pathaway played upon him like iron bolts. An upward blow, like a lightning stroke, under the chin, gave Bill Brace the *coup de grâce*—stretching him senseless upon the ground.

"So let brutal insolence be punished!" cried the hunter. Then, turning to Joice and Beck, with a lofty and scornful air, added: "Which of you will take his turn next?"

Presently, Brace began to revive; there was too much brute hardihood in him to remain long passive. He blustered to his feet

hurling impotent imprecations upon his conqueror; but, too weak to stand, fell with a helplessness that made every joint in his body crack. But, though deprived of physical power, he still command had his vocal organs.

"Your bowie-knives, men! Cut up the rascal as you would a slaughtered buffalo. He's the devil!—at him, Ben Joice! Give him plenty of steel, Zene Beck, and I'll be your debtor forever!"

Quick as thought, Pathaway put his hand to the back of his neck, and drew forth one of those terrible weapons that bear the famed name of the great Texan fighter—Bowie, the brave, the dashing, the daring. The bright, silvery, two-edged blade flashed rapidly in the air, reflecting the moonlight like the facets of a diamond.

Joice and Beck drew the same weapons from their leggings, and were in the act of springing forward, with an uncivilized, free-trapper shout, when they were arrested by the gladiator attitude and gleaming blade of the gray hunter.

"Cowards!" he shouted—"why do you pause? Come on, and the *mangeur de lard* will give you a lesson in wild-wood manners."

"Don't let him scare you, though he be the devil!" muttered Brace, hoarsely.

Ashamed of their weakness and uncertainty, Joice and Beck advanced upon Pathaway, who awaited the onset with rigid muscles and compressed lips. Both sprang at him at once; but, evading them with the same adroitness that had marked his encounter with Brace, he gave Joice a wound upon the right arm that nearly disabled him. At the same moment, an arrow struck Beck upon the shoulder, and the two dogs, Smuggler and Misfortune, freed from the restraint of Sebastian, charged the trappers, baying furiously, while a voice shouted: "What's the matter? Hold up! There's a cussed little diffikilty here—isn't there?"

The combatants paused, and saw a tall figure, clad in buckskin, with a rifle upon his shoulder, approaching them from the northern stretch of the valley.

CHAPTER V.

THE HUT.

A little in the rear of the tall figure, appeared another of lesser altitude, but of greater breadth of shoulder. After the quaint address of Nicholas, the hostile parties suspended their sanguinary operations, with the exception of a few kicks at the dogs (who were inclined to worry them) and considered the new-comers with interest.

"Be quiet, Smuggler! Down, Misfortune! It's best to inquire into this business, I reckon. Been a trifle of fightin' here, it 'pears. What critter's this on the ground? His head looks like a rotten apple, I swear to gracious! It never could a been a handsome face, that o' his'n. I don't believe my gran'father, in all his travels in Centril Afriky, ever come across sich a specimen of human natur'; though he seed niggers with tails, apes that could talk, and monkeys that had real military musters, with captains and gin'erals, majors, and corporals."

The dogs became silent at the voice of their master, who now turned slowly to Pathaway, and began a philosophical and by no means hurried examination of his person, keeping up a running accompaniment of remarks.

"Stranger, you've licked him like p'ison! I don't know the beginnin' nor the end on't, nor whose side justice is on; but, by the looks, should say it was on your'n."

"I believe it is, sir. I was forced to defend myself, or submit to robbery, or worse. I trust I have taught that bully a lesson that he'll remember during the remainder of his life," answered Pathaway, pointing to Brace, who was lying upon the ground in a sorry plight.

"He must have a short memory, if he forgits it! I must say, mister, that you don't look capable of handlin' sich a big lump o' flesh. But you've give him enough on't, and don't 'pear to be cut up much yourself. What was the mean skunk doin' all the while?"

"Accordin' to his brute instincts—wasting his strength in ill-aimed blows, striking out like an old woman, instead of straight from the shoulder, trying to perform with his threats and invectives what should have been done with skillfully-directed bone and muscle."

"You're a trump, by gracious! As you stan' there, you 'mind me of my uncle, the historian. He was about the same height, only

shorter. He had an arm like your'n, only longer. His legs was the very picters of them you stan' on, on'y his was bowed out a good 'eal, and wasn't so straight, as 'twere. His countenance was more open nor yours, 'cause his mouth was a third wider. A remarkable nose had my uncle. I've never met one like it till I see your'n; but 'twas a heap bigger, stranger—a heap bigger! I seed it once in the night with the moonbeams shinin' on it, and it looked like a cock o' hay. Ah! sich an orgin as it was! 'Twas jest in his line, howsomnever, for bein' a historian, he could smell out facks that he couldn't git no other way."

The gray hunter smiled. There were no traces of the recent excitement upon his face; it was now pleasant in expression. The muscles that had been as rigid as steel bands had relaxed their unnatural tension, and now looked white and soft as a woman's. The gladiator spirit in his eyes was quenched; he was no longer the implacable and pitiless avenger, but the composed and quiet looker-on. He had dexterously concealed his weapon about his person, and now proceeded to put on his gray frock.

The trapper outlaws listened to this colloquy, which passed quickly, in silence, when Ben Joice approached Nick's companion, who had been making various gesticulations and pantomimic signs.

"Why don't you speak, Jack Wiley, instead of makin' an ape of yourself by noddin' and flourishin' and holdin' your fingers on your lips? Ain't ashamed of our company, be ye? Haven't forgot old acquaintances, I s'pose?"

"Don't!" said Wiley, edging up to Joice, and speaking in a low voice, shielding his mouth with his open hand on the side nearest Nick.

"Don't?" what the deuce do you mean?" said Ben, gruffly.

"Haven't you any sense, man? I don't want you to know me too well afore this tall, talkative feller. He's one that we shall have to watch sum'wat. The Injuns, he says, call him Doubledark; and if they do, you may depend on't, he's a sly one. I shouldn't wonder if he's sent on purpose to look arter us, though he's done me a good turn. He's lookin' at us; don't talk to me too much."

Nick's observant eyes had already noted their conduct, and he perceived, with ready acumen, that they were birds of similar plumage.

"Young man," he said, addressing the gray hunter, "your work seems to be done here; I think you'd better go with me. These men don't owe you much good-will, and the quicker you part company, the better for both."

"I accept your offer," answered Pathaway, courteously; "glad to escape these outlaws with my life."

"Come, Jack Wiley, if you're goin' with me. It's time to leave these merry companions. They're a little too free in their notions to make them safe and agreeable comrades of the camp fire."

Bill Brace staggered to his feet, and leaning against Joice, indulged in a storm of invective and menace, interspersed with Indian and French, that could find its parallel in the Northwest only, among the hybrid and lawless trappers.

"Bill Brace has a memory like an Injun! Wa! wa! Youngster, you've tetched a fire-brand to the nose of the grizzly bear!" he roared, shaking his fist with the unsteadiness of a drunken man.

"Should say he'd tetched it with sumthin' harder'n a fire-brand," remarked Nick.

"I'm trapper and Ingin! Wa! whoop! More Ingin than trapper. I'll have your blood, you pork-eater! I'll foller ye night and day. I'm Bill Brace, and nobody shall live to say that he's whipped me. Kill him, Jack Wiley, and I'll give ye a hundred beaver-skins! Where's your pistols, you sneaks? I—I—I feel faint. Git me some water, Ben. My head's floatin' all about; lay me down, or I shall tumble." Bill Brace pressed heavily upon his companion, who laid him upon the ground in a partial swoon.

Nick moved from the spot, the dogs jumping about him.

"Sebastian! Sebastian! What, ho! Sebastian!" he shouted.

Smuggler darted forward to the cluster of pines and commenced barking. Nick hurried to him at once; he found the youth lying insensible, with his bow in his left hand. He raised him tenderly in his arms.

"Poor lad! poor lad!" he muttered. "He's

seen that terrible fight, and it's been too much for his nerves." Then to Pathaway, "He's not a strong boy, mister; he hasn't been very well lately. Measles or sumthin'; and 'tisn't the measles, neither."

A smile curled the lips of the gray hunter; but the moment he obtained a fair view of Sebastian's face, it gave place to an expression of sympathy and surprise.

"A *bois brulé*!" he murmured.

"What kind of a boy?" asked Nick, somewhat startled.

"A *bois brulé*," repeated Pathaway.

"He's a good boy, whatever kind of a boy he may be besides. He's so kind, so gentle, and then he's got sich sperit! He's limpy as a rag now, but he'll stiffen up by-and-by, and be as peart, and brave as a Camanche chief. His system is let down, and you can't tell what folks is when their systems is down. He isn't a coward, not a bit on't. O Lord! no!"

"Are you his father, and is he your son?" asked Jack Wiley, with a sneer. "His cheeks are a leetle tawny, I observe."

"If I'm his father, he's my son, I allow. Contrawise, no," responded Nicholas, curtly.

Sebastian began to revive; his large, soft eyes opened upon Nick. A shudder shook his slight person.

"Don't think on't, boy, don't think on't; it's past now and over, and nobody's killed. Somebody'd been killed, if their wounds had been mortal, but they wasn't. Cheer up! sich things happen every day, on'y you don't see 'em."

"What's happened, Nicholas?" he asked, in a faint voice.

"Nothin' of no consequence; a spugilistic display, in which one o' the parties got condemnedly injured. How do you feel now, little 'un?"

There was much of tenderness in Nick's voice. The boy put his hands over his eyes and held them there a moment.

Pathaway regarded him with both pity and admiration. Those small hands seemed so unfit for the wilderness; the feet and the form, too, were so effeminate.

"A pretty lad! a pretty lad!" murmured the gray hunter. "But too delicately reared to endure the hardships of this kind of life. He should go back to his quiet home on the banks of Red River, or wherever that home may be."

"Can you walk now?" asked Nicholas. Then to Pathaway: "Ah! sir, sich a walker as he is when he's in his nat'ral health! He rides, too, like a monkey. The hoss isn't bridled yet that can throw him off. He's never so much stouter than he looks. He come of a 'ristocratic family, and wasn't put to work like others of his age. His father was a French count, an English duke, a Rooshan prince in disguise, or some sich character; I don't disrecollect his title exactly. His mother was a half-breed of very high caste; the most beautiful specimen of womankind that was ever seen. How do you feel now, little 'un? Hasn't your walkers got stiff enough to stan' on? If you can't toddle up the hill, I can carry ye, well's not; rather like to carry boys of your age up mountings."

Nicholas looked at the boy very earnestly, who, by the aid of his friendly hand, arose. During this time he had not become conscious of the presence of the gray hunter; but now, perceiving him, was greatly surprised, changed color, and would have fallen, had he not been supported by the trapper.

"What now, sonny? Do you feel the dis-temper comin' on ag'in?" Then, addressing Pathaway: "He's been subject to these 'tacks ever since he had the whoopin'-cough two year ago and up'ards. It didn't clear off well, the cough didn't; but settled in his constitution, specially his limbs. The whole village took it to once, and whooped so like p'ison that all the Injins in the kentry took to their heels. It's a disease that never ought to be 'lowed the north side o' the Rocky Mountains."

While Nick was making these apologies and explanations, he held the youth upon his left arm, and poured some whisky into his mouth. The fiery liquid went burning down his throat, producing a paroxysm of strangulation, which, though attended with danger, had the effect to restore him to consciousness. He smiled faintly, and said that he was quite well again.

"Sartin!" responded Nick, good-naturedly. "Twant nothin' in the world but appleplexy, which isn't serious till you've had it a few times. My brother, Doctor Whiffles, used to cure it 'bout diffikilty with red precipity and yaller

ochre."

"Not a common remedy," remarked Pathaway.

"Yes, it wasn't a common remedy; it wa'n't known to nobody but my brother, and the secret died with him. Will inform ye some time how he came to a full stop. Ah! your legs is a little shaky, yet, but they'll grow stronger with use, and longer, too. Lean on me, and don't be afraid of tirin' me."

"You'd better have a nuss and a wagon for him!" said Wiley, squinting maliciously.

"I know folks," retorted Nick, invidiously, "who need a cart and a hangman; though, mind ye, I don't say I've seen any sich tonight."

"Children should have their suppers early, and be put to bed," added squint-eyed Jack, pretending not to notice the innuendo conveyed in the trapper's reply. "I never liked puny milk-sop boys, that faint away like gals, and turn pale at the sight o' blood. Boys a'n't what they used to be afore the settlements got so thick."

"Everything changes!" said Pathaway. "There are free trappers who are not what they should be."

"I a'n't in no hurry to quarrel with you, mister. You can wait Jack Wiley's time, can't ye?"

The squint-eyed growled and looked askance at the hunter; there was both malice and menace in his face.

Sebastian toiled slowly up the ascent, assisted by the careful Nick. They reached the plateau, and entered the hut. The fire was renewed, and the parties were soon more palpably revealed to each other in the bright glare. The youth's eyes often wandered to Pathaway, who, in turn, as often looked at the boy. While he felt compassion for his weakness, he admired his uncommon beauty. He received with courtesy Nick's abundant protestations respecting the lad's bravery and hardihood, while at the same time he more than half doubted the trapper's ingenuousness. The latter bestirred himself with cheerful alacrity in preparing a comfortable supper, of which the gray hunter and Sebastian partook sparingly, while Jack Wiley devoured not only his own proportion, but infringed upon that of his neighbors. In fact, he was blessed with the appetite of a fasting bear, and swallowed the roasted buffalo-meat with astonishing facility.

Sebastian, at first, honored this individual with but little attention; but when the fire-light revealed his features, he became the object of closer notice, which was returned on his part by long and stupid stares, which did not interfere at all with the process of mastication. The gray hunter, having finished his abstemious repast, threw himself carelessly upon a buffalo skin, which his thoughtful host spread for his accommodation. Wiley, provided with a pipe by the same hand, and disposed of in similar fashion, abandoned himself contentedly to the dreamy enjoyment of smoke, sustained and kept in countenance by his entertainer.

The youth, drawing a scarlet blanket about him, snuggled cosily and timidly into a corner of the hut, anxious, visibly, to shun observation; while Nick, as if by accident, but probably with a view to favor his wishes, placed himself partially between him and his guest.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DEVIL'S GATE.

Conversation flagged. The pipe dropped from Jack Wiley's lips, he sank back into a horizontal position, and slept. The others soon followed his example, and everything was quiet in the solitary hut. Wiley opened his eyes, raised his head, contemplated the sleepers a moment, then arose and walked out softly. The dog Smuggler aroused a little, but seeing no occasion for watching his master's guest, returned again to his canine dreams. Free of the hut, Wiley crossed the plateau rapidly. Nick's horse was grazing with equine satisfaction upon its margin.

"It's not a handsome beast!" muttered Jack, "but he has good p'int. His mane is rather shaggy, but his tail is a beauty, and them is nice legs, too, for speed—they're smooth, clean, and parfiet in the j'int. I like that back, the small head, and fine curve of the neck. 'Twould be almost wicked to leave sich a creetur ahind. I owe the queer feller a good turn, I know; but friendship shouldn't interfere with mere matters o' business."

Wiley turned the axes of his non-coinci-

dent eyes as nearly upon the horse as possible, with a longing, wishful expression. Then unbuttoning his hunting-shirt, drew forth a stout lariat that was passed several times around his person for concealment. He walked confidently up to the animal, who suffered him to approach and adjust the lariat about his neck and nose. This preliminary attended to, Wiley leaped upon his back. Shagbark—we will conform to the humor of Nick in the matter of names—started off well enough, and went fifty rods, perhaps, as kindly as a horse could, when he came to a full stop, thrust out his fore-feet, depressed his head between them, threw up his hinder part with a quickness and energy that sent the horse-stealer somersaulting over his neck. Jack alighted upon his shoulders with a shock that struck sparks of fire from his squint-eyes. For a brief space he saw nothing but a starry host dancing, curveting through the air in the most fantastic manner.

Nick Whiffles, meantime, had slumbered as lightly as the ungrateful trapper, and arose and followed him soon after his unceremonious exit. From the cover of the cotton-woods he saw him seize and mount Shagbark, and ride away, as described. Now the man that the Indians called Doubledark was not one to submit tamely to the loss of his property, especially when that property was a favorite horse. So, returning to the hut for his arms, he pursued the offender, and witnessed with feelings which we will leave entirely to the imagination, the ingrate's misadventure.

"I knowed he'd do it!" quoth Nick, with pride. "I'd never forgive him if he hadn't. He'd no right to let himself be stole by that mean skunk, who'll git into a pison diffikilty soon if a work o' grace don't take place in his moril nater. The traitor! the runagade! to forgit the fate I've saved him from this night. He'll have to be hanged—he'll never be any better till he's hanged."

"Them's some o' the tricks that tall critter larned ye, eh? I'll thrash that kind o' stuff out of ye when I git ye into the mountains. Whoa! stan' still! You won't do that thing so easy agin. There—now put ahead!" said Jack, recovering himself and remounting.

"He's on agin, by mighty! We'll, if he can stick on, he shall be welcome to him. I'll never own a hoss that'll let sich a scoundrel ride him."

While Nick was speaking, Shagbark was proving that his training had not been in vain. Having made a few wild plunges forward, he reared straight upon his hinder feet, made a splendid pirouette, dashed to the right, then to the left, and ended by throwing himself down, and rolling over. Had not the horse-stealer been very agile, he would not have escaped without broken bones. As it was, he sustained bruises of the flesh and abrasions of the skin.

"I'll never yield a p'int—if I can't ride ye, I'll lead ye!" exclaimed Jack, advancing to regain the end of the lariat, which trailed upon the ground. Shagbark, if not wise as a serpent, yet wise as his master could make him, now thoroughly in the mood of displaying his qualities, suddenly turned tail upon his admirer, and planting both feet on his chest, knocked what breath out of him that happened to be in him at the time, and left him doubled up in the shape of a half-moon on the plateau. Had not the force of those retributive feet been nearly spent before they reached him, Jack Wiley would have never thrown lariat over horse again.

Nick Whiffles lay down in the grass, and enjoyed one of those silent and smothered, yet satisfactory laughs, that sometimes come upon one almost irresistibly, whose outward expression is impossible or unallowable.

Shagbark having performed this feat, went capering back to his grass, with the lariat trailing under his feet.

After rolling about a while, like a man suffering the purgatorial pains of bilious colic, Wiley arose, and with bent figure and muttered imprecations, started off across the country in the direction of Trapper Valley.

"I wasn't greatly mistaken in his character," soliloquized Nick, as he tracked Wiley on his devious way. "There's sunthin' inside of me that allers tells me when a man can be trusted. I wonder what 'tis what tells people who is to be trusted and who isn't. I plucked him like a brand from the burnin', and I don't know that I'm sorry for it; I'm on'y sorry that there's sich base ingratitude in the world. But it don't trouble me—nothin' troubles me."

I take the world as I find it. It's a good world, I allow, as good as the Master o' Life could make, for I know that he's so good and true that he'd made a better one if he could. There's bad folks in it—sartin, there's bad folks in it; but all these things'll come right in the course o' natur'. Wonder where he's goin'?"

As there was no one to answer the trapper's last interrogation, he was obliged to depend on himself for a suitable response; and after dogging him up hill and down through gully, ravine, and defile, he stood at last on the eminence overlooking Trapper Valley, while Jack Wiley was making his way down the declivity toward Devil's Gate.

"He don't 'pear to be so much afeared o' the hopgoblins as he was two or three hours ago," muttered Nicholas. "I think I'm on the track of them I've been lookin' for. I'll git at the mystery at last—people allers gi at mysteries when they try. I'll just keep the gentleman in sight. There isn't no harm in knowin' the kind o' company he keeps, and it may do a heap o' good. I must hurry, for it's near daylight; and I don't b'lieve it's a safe place to explore when the sun is shinin'."

The ground which the parties were now traversing was cut up and rendered dangerous by yawning chasms, jagged rocks, rifts, and gulches. There were marks everywhere around him of volcanic convulsions, that had, at some period of the world's history, upheaved the foundations of the mountains, and east forth glowing streams of melted rock and earth. Frequently Wiley was lost to view, hidden by the rugged inequalities of the descent. Nick followed the horse-stealer with all that philosophical patience for which he was renowned, although the undertaking cost him much labor, and some bruises and scratches from the sharp and flinty surfaces. He drew near the valley, and saw Wiley disappear through a gigantic archway of rocks.

"'Twas rightly named," said Nick, gazing at the gloomy portal with interest. "If it don't look like the Devil's Gate, I'm no judge, and don't know a common door from an opening in the clouds."

The two sides of the gate were formed by towering columns of basalt, which, leaning toward each other, met at the top. Other shafts of the same formation, some larger, some smaller, filled up the picture, and being crowded closely together, left but one main entrance to the mysterious region called Lost Trapper Valley. When the object of his pursuit had passed out of sight, the curiosity of Nicholas was so much excited, that he was unwilling to return without making further explorations. Advancing, he stood upon the weird portal, while the mimic city loomed up before him in the northern quarter. He went forward, but darkness was before him. It seemed to him that he was entering a subterranean region. The air was chilly and freighted with damp vapor, while the footing was dangerous. He had proceeded but a short distance, when he made a misstep, and received a fall that bewildered him; but becoming clear in a moment, went on again. He paused now and then amid his stumblings and blunderings, and tried to see the stars overhead, but could not. Very cautious persons would have abandoned the adventure; but Nick, like Napoleon, trusted in his star. He had escaped so many perils, that he seriously doubted whether a real misfortune could befall him. His strangely-constituted mind had acquired such a strong belief in a protecting Providence, that the apprehension of evil seldom or never obtruded.

After considerable groping, the trapper found himself in a spot where he could obtain a glimpse of the sky through the branches of large, over-hanging trees. Hearing a hissing and roaring noise, he proceeded, and discovered the cause of the same in a hot spring that threw water to the height of several feet, emitting clouds of steam which stood over the spot like a misty canopy. Whatever feelings of superstition inherited by Nick were awakened. How did he know but the traditions of the red men were true? He had lived and communed with Nature less than forty years, and did not know her thoroughly; some of her secrets, questionless, were hidden from his perceptions. He had not seen her unveiled—he had known her outward forms only. There might be a subtle arcanum transcending all his practical notions, to which he was a stranger. There was no weak blood in Nick Whiffles—he could not be a coward any

more than he could be mean, and the latter was among the impossibilities; but there is a wholesome regulator that governs the abstruse machinery of man when the common safeguards fail.

Nicholas felt a thrill of cold—a shivering of the nerves that was uncomfortable, and turned to retrace his steps, anxious for the open sky and familiar landmarks. He had not made much progress, when he became aware that he was not alone in the tunnel. He heard scratching sounds on the rocks, like a dog or larger animal scrambling over them. The darkness was too great to allow him to see far, although he was extremely desirous to know what kind of companionship he was keeping. He was naturally sharp-sighted; and, getting accustomed to the midnight sombreness, he was able to discern an object moving along a little in advance, in a parallel line with himself. At first, he was disposed to think it a person creeping upon the hands and knees—but he soon abandoned this idea as incorrect. To satisfy his doubts, he threw a small stone at it, and it was answered by a threatening growl.

Nick paused; his position was most unenviable. He was undecided whether to advance or retreat; but, as the bear kept on, he concluded to proceed, believing that there was more safety before than behind him, for the glimpse he had obtained of the vestibule of Trapper Valley had impressed him unfavorably. Nick felt his way along, guiding himself by the pointed rocks on his left, narrowly escaping several dangerous rifts and pitfalls. He reached, to his satisfaction, the portals of the Devil's gate, and was congratulating himself on his good luck, when a muttered growl a few paces to his right, caused him to start, grasp his rifle, and half unsheath his bowie-knife.

Standing by one of the prismoids of basalt, looking over his left shoulder with open mouth, was the bear—a grizzly of formidable size. The trapper partly raised his rifle—at which movement Bruin growled savagely, showing rows of teeth like spears of ivory.

Nick knew the nature of the animal—that he was tenacious of life, and nearly impervious to the assaults of man. The pain of a rifle ball excites his fury without depriving him of the power of doing mischief—that it was seldom, indeed, he could be brought down by a single shot.

"No, no! it won't do!" muttered the trapper. "He's an animile that don't admit of a dead shot. Besides, it isn't light enough to do that kind o' shootin' that decides the question of life and death. I allers had a knack o' runnin' into p'ison diffikilties, and never shall outgrow it. But I've squeaked out of so many dangers, that I don't believe I was preserved for bear-meat at last. If I should be devoured by this critter, I wonder if they'd git hold on't down in the clearin's and put it into the tattlin' newspapers. I'd bother 'em, I allow, 'cause there's nobody but the bear to tell on't!"

Nick smiled grimly; he derived melancholy satisfaction from the conceit. He was still full of his old quaintness—it was ready to flow out of the comical corners of his mouth, to twinkle at you from his genial eyes. Danger could not change the spirit that was in him; under all circumstances, he was Nick Whiffles, the unique, the whimsical. Peril, from man or beast, could dash him for a moment only; he reacted like an india-rubber ball.

"Come, now, don't threaten too much!" he added, addressing bruin, who was making very hostile demonstrations; "for there's a stickin' p'int in human natur, beyond which patience isn't virtue. If you was'n't so good at runnin' up hill, I'd give ye a pill right under your ear—I would, by mighty! Snarl, if ye want to! I killed two of your brothers last fall. You're nothin' but an over-grown dog, anyway, and out o' shape at that. Your nose looks as though 'twas made to pick the leavin's out of a sink-spout, and your hind feet is as long as a hosse's head!"

Bruin arose and sat upon his haunches, his fore-feet hanging down like the flippers of a seal, while his back rested against the pillar of basalt. Nick would have retreated, but he stood, unfortunately, in the Devil's Gate, and could not safely go in any other direction than through the tunnel toward Trapper Valley—a locality he did not then care to visit. He maintained his post, keeping his eyes steadily upon the bear. He cautiously cocked his rifle but did not point it, fearing to make any

movement to further excite the ire and suspicion of bruin.

"I don't like to be stared at in that way, you sarpint! Never seed me afore, did ye? Like to eat me, perhaps—but 'twould be the toughest mouthful that ever you got hoid of. Never come across Nick Whiffles in your travels, eh? Rayther prepossessin' in my 'pearance, I calculate; but I warn ye that ye'll find more grease on my huntin'-shirt than on any part o' my system. Haven't had much time to slick up, lately."

Bruin now stood singularly erect, and took two steps toward Nicholas, who leveled his rifle.

"Do that ag'in, old boy, and you and I'll have a p'ison diffikilty, right off!"

The bear did not stir, but stood up straight as a man. As the two confronted each other, the first glow of morning appeared in the west: and a few golden threads of light, the *avant-coureurs* of the coming sun, fell upon the columns, towers, and walls of the mimic city. The form of the bear sank to the earth, and the figure of a human being arose. Nick recoiled against one of the columns of the mountain gate.

"An Injin, I swear to gracious! Who are ye, redskin? What you masqueradin' in that shape for? You'll git into diffikilty sometime in that way!"

"Doubledark is brave. He does not fear the teeth of the bear, and walks with a big heart in the valley of the Thunder-Spirit!" replied the figure that had uprisen from the skin of the bear.

"It is Multnomah, chief of the Shoshonés!" exclaimed Nick. "Glad to see ye, though this is the last place of all the world where I should look for ye. Your people are not often found in this neighborhood, on account of the stories that are told about what is seen and heard hereabouts."

"There is a Manito dwells here that we must not offend!" answered Multnomah, looking searchingly at Nick. "The Shoshonés make war upon men, not upon spirits—the first can be seen and handled, the last are like the wind, invisible, and too fine for the touch of mortals. Doubledark believes in a Manito of the mountains?"

The Shoshoné, who had advanced and shaken hands with the trapper, now regarded him with searching intensity. The question was intended to draw out infinitely more than it expressed. Nick became quaint in a moment—his eyes said, plainly: "I am a pump; work the handle, and out it comes." In fact, the trapper thrust his right arm downward, in imitation of the arm of a pump.

"Ever see one of 'em?"

"At Selkirk," said the Indian, with a smile. "Very good—fetch water—cool when it comes up. Wah! My brother is not a fool. He knows which way the buffalo goes by the track, he can tell when the winds will rush down the mountains by the looks of the clouds, and he learns by the setting of the sun what the weather will be to-morrow."

"Red brother, your words are sensible—they tickle the ears of Doubledark. I despise a fool, by mighty! Redskin, the air isn't good here—let us be walkin'."

"No," said Multnomah, shaking his head; "air bad—couldn't live here long. Wah! Brother, why did you come in to such bad air?"

Nick had started off up the mountain side, but upon hearing this interrogatory, stopped short, and showed a wide, quizzical mouth to the Shoshone.

"I went to see the Thunder-Spirit," he responded.

"Doubledark is too dark! he does not deal openly with his brother—his thoughts are shut up. We cannot walk together."

"Shoshoné, there have been strange rumors about Trapper Valley—they have reached my ears. Is Multnomah discreet?"

The Shoshoné made no reply. A scornful smile curled his lips.

"I understan; it was ag'in the grain, and it wasn't right, I allow, to question the discreetness of a Shoshoné chief. Give us your hand, redskin, and we'll make a clean thing on't. There ain't many white men that can be trusted fully; but I know the kind o' stuff you're made on. We've camped together many a night, Injin; we've looked at the stars and the moon at the same time, and wondered how the sky come to be, and how long it had been. We've hunted in company, slept at the same fire, and eaten of the same buffalo off the same

piece o' bark, roasted over the same blaze, and on the same stick. Once, Injin, we starved together, and feasted on half-starved dog at the end of our fast. That was in the neighborhood of Beer Spring. We've trapped beaver on the Yellow Stone and at the headwaters of Salmon River, and never quarreled. And, speakin' of trappin', reminds me that I've lost traps hereabouts—at a place called Black Rock, and at Otter Creek, near the Red Sandstone Cliffs."

"Doubledark has lost traps. Is he the only one who has reason to complain? Have not others lost traps and peltries? Is there not more to be said, white man?" answered Multnomah, with earnestness.

"Not on'y traps, but them that set 'em—not on'y peltries but them that owned 'em, have disappeared, and there's nobody to explain it."

"The bad Manito is to blame, brother," said the Shoshoné.

"Injin, neither you nor I believe in sich nonsense. The Thunder-Spirit would cease to be heard if you should quench the volcanic fires that burn in the mountains. It isn't the spirits out the body that we have to fear; it's the spirits in the body that does the mischief. I've had more trouble with them I could see, than with them I couldn't. Redskin, my eyes have not been shet."

"I see that they have been open; and I am glad."

"Injin, I've been watchin' these mountains. They have dark secrets, if they'd on'y tell 'em; but they are mute, and what we don't know we must l'arn for ourselves. There are them that walk up and down by night, and disappear in out-of-the-way places. They don't seem to be afraid of the bad Manito. No one that sees 'em knows where they come from, where they go to, or what their business is."

"Now, Doubledark is not dark; he speaks plainly to his friends. Are they white or red?"

"Injin, Nick Whiffles is a man of truth; his talk is not crooked. Their skins is white, but their hearts is black. I'm sorry to say it, by gracious; but so it is, and there's no gettin' round it."

"There are bad men among all nations. There are red men whose ways are not straight. The bad white men inhabit the mountain of rocks and the valley below. This is why you found the Shoshoné in disguise."

"Your purpose was the same as mine, I reckon. You wanted to look into the mysteries of the valley, as 'twere, and see what you could see. The critter you call Doubledark was there on the same errand. What's the use o' mincin' matters, Injin? There's a set o' p'ison rascals prowlin' about in this region, doin' a heap o' mischief; and I'm goin' to hunt till I find and bring 'em to justice. I'm on their trail; I've slow-tracked 'em. They've done things that make my blood bile like the waters of a hot spring. I shall hound 'em, and camp on their path till I discover their secret lurkin'-place. There's deeds that must be punished—wrongs that must be avenged—accounts that must be wiped out and choked out with the halter. I know there's danger—'twouldn't be excitin' if there wasn't—and some have paid dearly for their curiosity. But it don't frighten me—it can't skeer Nick Whiffles—you can't skeer him. O Heaven, no! Injin, let us devote ourself to this work; let us dog out these condemned scoundrels, and purge the mountains of sich a load of wickedness."

"But the Thunder-Spirit!" queried Multnomah.

"May go to thunder!" retorted Nick, emphatically.

"Doubledark, the Great Spirit, willed that we should meet; he wills everything—men, as well as the clouds and the rain. He said: 'To-night the pale-face and red-face shall meet, and speak truly to each other.' It is good that bad men should be punished. You see this bear-skin?" The Shoshoné had rolled up the skin, and fastened it to his back. "In it I have prowled among the rocks, and seen men go in and out at the dark gate. To-night, something seemed to tell me to enter, and seek out these bad spirits."

"What did you see?" demanded Nick.

"I saw the hot-spring throwing up water and smoke."

"What else? I observed that myself, and don't feel much wiser for it."

"I went a long way among great masses of rocks, that the Great Spirit had hurled down from the mountains in his anger, or broken up

from the foundations of the valley. Then I came to running water, that whirled and eddied among the ledges, and passed out of sight in a black abyss. Afterward, I crossed a gulch, and found a spot where the grass grew, and the wormwood was rank and tangled, supported by the wash of the mountains in the rainy seasons. Beyond this were trees—some old, and gnarled, and twisted; others dwarfed, and wounded by the descent of rocks from the cliffs above. Multnomah paused on the margin of this wood."

"What happened then?"

"It was very dim there—like the silent passage to the land of souls. I could see but a little strip of the sky. If a Shoshoné could be afraid, Multnomah would have had fear. For a time he stood still, and thought of all the tales he had heard of the valley. He tried to hear the voice of his friendly Manito, telling him what to do. Then there was the sound of steps; and he laid down upon the earth, and saw people of your nation. They looked like free trappers. Their beards were long; their hair hung upon their shoulders; their belts were heavy with knives and pistols, and they walked with a swaggering gait, like the red man, when his heart has grown big with fire water. They drove along before them a man and a woman. The man was Pontneuf, a Canadian voyageur; the woman was his daughter, very young, and fair as the new moon. The hands of Pontneuf were bound, and his head hung despairingly upon his breast, his daughter clinging to him, weeping. The heart of Multnomah was moved."

"I know the man well, and a right merry companion he used to be. I've boated with him more nor once, and his songs were allers cheerful and hearty, as he tugged at the oar. His darter—Nanny, I call her—was a perfect gem in the way of feminine goods. Injin, it makes me melancholy, by mighty! She's too young and pooty for the fate she's likely to meet with. It kind o' chills me as I think on't. It puts me in mind of sumthin' horrible that I witnessed one dark night, at Black Rock. It was a woman, jest as in this case, and lovely as a reg'lar angel, that was consarned in it. I marked the men who did it; I can recall their ugly countenances, as I saw 'em in the torchlight. How she held up her little hands! How beautiful she asked for mercy! Her words thrilled through me like arrers, but they fell blunted from the hard hearts of the mountain robbers. 'Pears to me I can see them white arms wavin' to and fro in the air, like the white wings of a flutterin' dove. Injin! I was ready to burst with pity and rage. The perspiration rolled down me like glass beads. If I'd on'y had one trusty friend with me, I'd tackled 'em, though they was six. As 'twas, I come pesky near pitchin' into 'em like a cannon-ball. But I did better nor that; I pressed down my chokin' feelin's, and was prudent. Shoshoné, them hardened critters wrapped the gal in a cloak, with a stone in't, and threw her into the water, which was dark and deep. She knew nothin' about it, though, for she'd gone into a dead faint; which was a good thing for her. She sunk in an instant. A few bubbles marked the spot where she went down, and then the water glassed over smooth, as if nothin' had happened. The murderers turned and hurried away, while I slipped into the stream, and dragged the precious offerin' from its cold baptism to the shore. Thank fortin, I saved her! Redskin, you can't tell the satisfaction that that night's work has give me. There never was sich beauty, sich goodness, sich truth, sich courage, and fortitude as her'n. O Lord, no!"

"What did Doubledark do with her?"

Nick Whiffles seemed taken by surprise; he did not answer with his usual promptness and heartiness.

"Sent her home to her parents—her brethers, I mean; and 'twasn't her brethers. neither. She had friends, you know, Injin, somewhere up in the mountains; and 'twasn't so much in the mountains as in the settlements."

"Wal!" said the Shoshoné.

Without heeding this laconic rejoinder, Nick continued:

"Ever since that circumstance, which didn't happen many months ago, I've set myself to work to find the perpetrators of the deed, and bring 'em to a reckonin'. Go on with your story, Injin."

The Frenchman and his daughter passed out of my sight among the rocks, and I saw them no more. I went back; I met Doubledark, who knows what then happened."

In friendly and confidential conversation, Nick and the Shoshone pursued their way toward the plateau.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CANON.

The gray hunter slept, unconscious of the exit of Jack and Nick. His sleep was troubled. The exciting scene through which he had recently passed gave a coloring to his dreams. Bill Brace, Ben Joice, and Zene Beck had a place in his thoughts, and harassed him for a long time; then he slumbered more peacefully. Anon, his lips moved; his countenance assumed a different expression—softer, milder, more earnest. The burden of his dream had changed. It seemed to him that a gentle hand touched his forehead; that a fair face bent over him; that bright eyes beamed above him like love's tender starlight.

"Una! Una!" he cried, springing to his feet, and stretching forth his arms in a transport of emotion. This action thoroughly awakened him. He panted, clasped his brow with both hands; then, looking about, saw the boy sleeping tranquilly in his scarlet blanket.

"I clasp—what is it that I clasp?"

No breathing from within my grasp

* * * * *

And art thou, dearest, changed so much,

As meet my eye, yet mock my touch?"

he murmured. Then, recollecting himself, he added:

"These vagaries are a shame upon my manhood! Time should have taught me resignation. Pshaw! I am weaker than yonder boy."

He sat down upon his couch, supporting his head with his hands, and appeared to plunge into a world of abstraction, where, doubtless, he found remembered landmarks, and scattered mementos of past joys and sorrows.

Sebastian opened his eyes, and looked at him timidly. The youth must have been cold, for a shiver ran over him, which was followed by a trembling of his whole frame. His cheeks were burning red, while his eyes shone unnaturally bright. He did not close them again till morning; but, remaining wakeful, continued to observe the movements of the gray hunter. Possibly, the lad was afraid; but the two dogs lay at his feet, and their strength and sagacity were no mean protection, even against greater odds.

When the sun streamed its rays into the hut, Sebastian arose, and was passing out, when Pathaway, starting from his reverie, addressed him:

"Have you slept well, my lad? Your nerves are not strong, I think?"

"I did not dream; the sleep that is without dreams is the sweetest, I've heard," answered Sebastian, carelessly.

"Dreams?" repeated Pathaway, coloring. Then, with a smile: "You are right, my boy; dreamless slumber is best. Dreams are uninvited guests, that intrude upon harassed minds."

Sebastian stood in the door of the hut; the sunshine fell like gold upon his face and hair.

"He might pass for an Anchises or Adonis," murmured Pathaway. "What is your name, youth?" he added.

"Sebastian Delaunay," returned the boy, indifferently.

"Was your mother handsome, boy?"

Sebastian smiled; and his brown cheeks took a deeper color.

"Her face was darker than mine; her hair was long and black; her eyes large and dreamy. To me, hunter, she was beautiful, though she was a dweller in lodges and wigwams."

"But your father—"

"Had a skin like yours," interrupted Sebastian, turning his back to his interrogator, as if tired of the subject.

"You have your mother's voice, lad, I should say."

Sebastian beat upon the ground with his moccasined foot.

"You called the honest trapper 'uncle,' if I remember rightly?"

"I called him uncle," said Sebastian, laconically—then walked from the hut.

He was gone a considerable time, and, when he returned, found Pathaway standing at the door.

"Where is my entertainer? I have looked for him in vain," he said, as Sebastian approached.

"He left in the night to follow the fellow Wilev. I suspect. I shall be anxious about

him if he does not come back soon; but he is wise, and can take care of himself."

The youth paused, and uttered an exclamation of terror. Pathaway looked up, and saw Nick coming, with a grizzly bear walking quietly beside him. Both Sebastian and the hunter felt an inclination to retire into the hut.

"O uncle Nick! do not come near with that frightful beast," cried Sebastian.

"Don't be afraid; I've magnetized the critter, and got him under subjection. Cur'ous, isn't it, what power there is in the will? Wouldn't believed it, 'less I'd seen it done. Howsomnever, he'd been tamed some afore I got him. Bought him of an Injin; and he's got some queer tricks, I allow. I can make him stan' up on his hind legs e'en almost as straight as a man—shake hands with his fore-paws—tell the time o' day by the sun—run, trot, or gallop—lay down or git up—and do anything that a dog can!"

"Keep him at a proper distance," said Pathaway; "for I never was partial to that kind of animal."

Sebastian ran into the hut for his bow, and came out with an arrow upon his string.

"Up, you p'ison critter, on to your hind legs, and let's dance the war-dance together!" said Nick, beginning to chant, in a monotonous manner, an Indian scalp-dance. The bear reared; and, standing quite erect, danced, in time and tune, with ludicrous gravity. The gray hunter and the youth laughed in concert.

"A wonderful bear, truly!" remarked Pathaway.

"Hunter, nothin' of the common kind comes up to my idee. You mightn't think it, but he can be trusted as well as any dog—not exceptin' Misfortin and Smuggler, who are the most knowin'est specimens of their race. He'll be good company for Sebastian when I go to look arter my traps."

The boy shook his head, and looked startled at this announcement.

"I like the dogs much better, Nicholas," he replied.

"The dogs are extr'ordiner in their line; but they haven't the sagacity of this 'ere bruin. Say, bow-wow, you shaggy animile."

The bear growled, very much like the copy Nick had set him.

"There! that's enough for this time," said Nicholas. "Lay down, and be quiet. Misfortin, stop barkin'; Smuggler, straighten your back down, and be civil to strangers. You don't have sich distinguished company every day."

"Give him something to eat," said Pathaway, with a quiet laugh.

"He devoured half a buffaler cow not ten minutes ago. If you's to offer him the nicest slice ever cut from a sirline, he wouldn't so much as turn it over with his nose. Come away, dogs, and don't tamper with him; for his temper isn't allers even.—Now, stranger, I allow it's time to 'pologize, and ten! to the duties o' hospitality."

Nick, with the assistance of Sebastian, proceeded to prepare a tolerable breakfast: Pathaway, as on the previous night, ate but sparingly. When their simple meal was ended, Nicholas and the hunter went away together, and walked upon the plateau a long time. The youth looked for the bear, but he had disappeared.

"I must part with you for the present," said Pathaway, after an earnest conversation with Nick. "If no accident befall me, I will return again to your hut."

"Every man knows his own business best; but I am sorry to have you leave me to-day. You won't take it onkind of me if I warn you to be cautious. The ruffian, Bill Brace, won't forget the floggin' you give him. The remembrance on't will be like a Mexican saddle on the sore back of a mustang. He'll be restive under it as a colt unbroke. And this isn't all," added Nick, depressing his voice: "there's sunthin' to be feared in the mountains and valleys of this region. The lonely trapper sometimes gits lost, and never comes back to his lodge. *Cachés* are often opened and robbed. It isn't a safe neighborhood for the young and inexperienced in this perilous line and business."

"I thank you, mountaineer, for your friendly counsel; be assured it is appreciated. I am not so new in the wilderness as not to know what places to shun, and which to seek. My life is not purposeless. I am not a mere waif wafted hither by chance winds. I know

what I would accomplish; I am strong and confident in myself; I know what my mind can plan, and what my body can execute."

"Your body isn't very large, though I allow it's put up in good shape," remarked Nick.

"It isn't the body that has power—it is the spirit that is in it. It is the mind that gives momentum and force to the physical frame. When a man is fighting in a good cause, the soul itself takes part in the contest; it flies into the fists and arms, converting the muscles into iron: it makes one invincible."

"That's so—jes' so!" said Nick, thoughtfully. "I've frequently thought in the same way; but I couldn't express it a quarter so well, though Doctor Whiffles could a handled the subject like a pill-box. There is somethin' in larnin' by mighty! But I can't have patience with them p'ison newspapers down in the clearin's, that meddle with private affairs, and drag the histories of folks afore the public in a ludickerous light, takin' off their style o' talkin', and makin' fun o' their queer p'int. I have. quoth Nick, shaking his head seriously, "been condemnedly injured by them as never seed me. I have, by mighty!"

"If a man will be Nick Whiffles, he must be famous," answered Pathaway. "Adieu, mountaineer, adieu! we shall soon see each other again."

The two adventurers shook hands, and the gray hunter went his way—the trapper watching him as he struck off to the northeast, and disappeared.

Pathaway entered a long reach of timber on the eastern slope of the mountain; and, after a walk of an hour, reached a small prairie at the base, which he crossed. This brought him to a lake of stagnant water—skirting which, still bearing to the east, he struck the lowest swell of the range just as the sun passed the meridian, and began to pour his rays from the western quarter of the heavens. Ascending the swell, he beheld at his feet a deep canon, running to the northwest. Years ago, it had probably been a conduit for water; but now green grass was growing in it. Fatigued, Pathaway stopped to rest: the scene, too, was one that invited him to stay, for it possessed that wild beauty which he admired.

"How picturesque! how grand! how refreshing!" he exclaimed. "How far apart are earth and sky—how pure the air between! I feel exalted by this solitary companionship with Nature; I stretch out my arms, and commune with her when all other companionship is denied."

Pathaway sighed, and gazed downward at the grassy bed of the canon. He saw, advancing from the western outlet, a trapper, staggering under a great load of peltries. His burden was heavy, but he bore it with a will; for every pound that pressed upon his shoulders was a voucher of his success. When quite blown, he rested the package against a jutting rock, or the convenient branch of a dwarf pinon, whose tenacious roots found a foothold in the rifts and crevices; then he toiled on, singing the chorus of a Canadian boat-song, or snatches of mountain melodies.

"He is rejoicing," thought Pathaway, "in the hard-earned fruits of his labors. To obtain that package of furs, he has suffered incredible hardships, and braved many dangers. Sing on, stout heart—you have a right to be merry. Alas! your class lacks one virtue: and that is, the virtue of frugality. In a month or two, yonder trapper, now comparatively rich, may return to his old haunts with scarcely a coat to his back, having squandered the proceeds of his peltries in dissipation and prodigality."

The report of a carbine interrupted Pathaway's reflections. Smoke puffed out from among the rocks on the other side of the canon, and sailed upward, white and misty. The lonely trapper fell upon his face, and his hands clutched the grass convulsively. Pathaway instantly changed his position, crouching low upon the ground. Two men sprang from the ledges, ran to the fallen man, and cut the pack from his shoulders. One of them pushed him with his foot to see if life remained in him.

"He won't set no more traps," he said. "His foot has pressed the last spring, and he's skinned his last beaver. It's a heavy pack, Ben, and the heaviest share belongs to me for doin' the business. Wasn't it my powder, and my lead, and my carbine, and my aim that fixed him?"

"All that may be, Zene Beck; but the free

mountaineers make a fair thing of the plunder. We have our laws, you know, and the cap'n'll see that they're carried out. As for shootin' him, couldn't I done the same thing myself, and not made no fuss about it, either? Come, come! it won't do to be avaricious, Zene. I carry arms as well as you; and many think me the better man," answered Ben Joice, gruffly.

"Don't provoke me, Ben Joice! I'm a good enough friend when there's no property at stake; but friendship stops where property begins. One-third for you—two-thirds for me; or the bowie-knife for both!" retorted Zene, with sullen ferocity, planting his left foot on the peltries, and drawing his knife with his right hand.

As quickly as might be, the other imitated his example, and their murderous blades reflected the rays of the sun like glancing mirrors. They struck, they parried, they made fearful plunges at each other, and both exerted themselves to the utmost to inflict a mortal injury. They had exchanged several flesh-wounds; and the affray would have terminated tragically, had not a man, with a red sash around his waist, leaped from the rocks, and shouted, in a loud voice:

"Hold there, brawlers! Put up your weapons. Are ye so hard up for amusement that ye must quarrel among yourselves? Who was the aggressor?"

"'Twas about the peltries," growled Beck.

"I'll settle the matter for ye, you blackguards! Ho, there, fellows!—come here."

The man in the sash waved his hand authoritatively, and a dozen men poured down into the canon, as though they had been vomited out of the earth.

CHAPTER VIII.

A RESURRECTION.

Pathaway perceived that the leader of these wild and uncouth men exercised a strong ascendancy over them. His word was law—his will paramount. The combatants separated sullenly, without disputing his authority. By his order, the pack of peltries was carried up among the rocks, by two of his fellows.

"You and Ben are at your old tricks again," said the captain, addressing Zene Beck. "You can't be quiet, and do mischief only when you're told. There's been a little too much of this lately; and the trappers and Ingins are talkin' about Trapper Valley, and the whole country hereabouts. This body musn't be left here exposed; it'll be found, and then there'll be more surmises and rumors afloat. Find a convenient place, some of ye, and bury him."

Instantly, several men set off in different directions, and soon discovered a suitable spot for their purpose; it was a deep hollow, at the bottom of a gulch, which intersected the canon at right angles, and not far from Pathaway. The body of the unfortunate trapper was dragged to the gulch.

"He's got done with that huntin'-shirt, I reckon!" said an ill-clad fellow. "What good 'll it do him, if we put him to bed with it on?"

The body was instantly despoiled of the coveted garment, and then thrown into the hollow. Pathaway, by creeping a few yards, was able to see these movements, and to hear the conversation of the outlaws. Feelings mournfully unpleasant crowded upon him; he was affected, he knew not why. He felt a singular sympathy for the victim of this wrong. He obtained a casual glimpse of the face as they cast him into his rough grave. The features, he thought, were placid, like one sleeping, and without the usual painful expression attendant upon death by gunshot wounds. The hollow was a depression between two ledges of red sand-stone, some eight feet in length, and three and a half in depth. One of the men cut some boughs from a pinon with his hatchet; while another, with less gentleness, cast upon these some flat rocks and fragments of a decayed tree. Just over the place of sepulchre, the earth upon the steep wall of the canon was loose, and the grim undertakers scratched it down upon the trapper. Presently, the grave was filled, the burial completed.

It appeared an ill way of dying, a melancholy end to a merry life; but a lingering death by disease, a wasting consumption, or a loathsome epidemic, are really things more dreadful. Pathaway's sympathies increased; a nervous excitement stole over him. The few moments consumed in covering the murdered man with earth were to him intolerably

long. Indignation and a terrible fever of impatience preyed upon him. Every bough, and rock, and handful of earth that they cast upon him, seemed pressing upon his own breast. In vain, he attempted to quell his over-active sensibilities; in vain, he recalled the tragical scenes he had witnessed on the prairies, and in the recesses of the ranges; he derived no consolation and fortitude from the same. He pressed his heated forehead to the ground, to cool it, and, closing his eyes, resolved not to look again. In that position he remained some time. Then he glanced down the gulch again. It was empty; but there was the trapper's grave, with that sickly, warning freshness upon it that always attaches to the newly-raised mound, and impresses one with mournfulness unspeakable, especially when it is heaped over our beloved. Ah! the fresh earth over a grave says so plainly: "Man, you are mortal!"

Pathaway looked anxiously down the canon, and saw the outlaws filing off to the right, through a narrow defile, the hindmost staggering beneath the weight of the dead trapper's peltries. The gray hunter darted down into the gulch, and, with his naked hands, began to dig the earth from the body. A frantic zeal, a terrible haste marked his movements. He labored like one upon whose efforts depended the matter of life and death. His face was pale, his lips compressed, and perspiration poured from his brow. A person, coming upon him suddenly while thus employed, would have pronounced him mad.

He scattered the earth; he hurled away the stones; he cast out the boughs and rotten fragments of wood, and, grasping the body by the shoulders, dragged it, with herculean strength, from beneath the mass that yet remained. Panting, he paused, glancing hurriedly about for water; he saw a small stream trickling down into the gulch above. He seized the unconscious form, and carried it there. He placed his hand upon the trapper's heart; it beat—he lived! He held his head under the descending rivulet, and let it fall upon his face, which was covered with earth, disfiguring every feature. The dash of the water upon him made him gasp, and brought back a portion of latent life. Pathaway cleansed the dirt from his wound. The ball had struck his head, near the occipital bone, and glanced along the skull, benumbing and suspending, for the time, all the functions of life. He had sustained other injuries upon various portions of his person, from the rocks that were thrown upon him; but Pathaway doubted not that he possessed sufficient vitality ultimately to recover.

The man's beard was quite long and heavy, but he was much younger than the gray hunter had at first thought. He judged that he was about twenty-eight, or maybe younger. His features were strongly marked, and his frame gave every indication of manly hardihood. A nearer view certainly gave Pathaway a more favorable impression of the man, increasing, also, that strange interest that had urged him to such efforts for his resurrection and resuscitation. He did not relax his exertions. Wiping his soiled lips and beard, he poured some spirit into his mouth from his flask. The trapper's blood felt the grateful stimulant, and revived. His chest heaved; and he moved his limbs, opened his eyes, and sat up.

"How do you feel? Are you not better?" asked Pathaway, gently.

The man looked at him vacantly; there was no soul, no language, no comprehension, in those orbs.

"The concussion has affected his brain; his mind is absent," muttered Pathaway, and unconsciously put his hand to his own head, as if the wound was there. He then resumed his friendly ministrations; but though the young trapper evidently gained strength, no ray of intelligence returned to illuminate his dull face. Pathaway took off his own frock, and put it on him, and assisted him to arise. He could stand without difficulty, but wanted that reason which was necessary to guide his footsteps across mountains and prairies, as heretofore.

The spectacle of his helplessness made the gray hunter inexpressibly sad. He tried every artifice to awaken his memory and arouse his intellect, but without success. He elicited only an idiotic stare or a childish smile.

"Poor fellow! poor fellow! I trust this will be but temporary. What shall I do with him? Providence has cast him upon me, and I'll take care of him. Yes, it was Providence that filled me with such a fury of zeal to unearth him, and

save him from his horrible entombment. We are watched over, even in the wilderness."

Pathaway led the trapper to a sheltered spot, and making him a couch of boughs upon the soft grass, laid him upon it, and spread his own blanket over him; then sitting by his side, watched him till he fell into a heavy sleep.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WOUNDED TRAPPER FINDS FRIENDS.

Pathaway awoke the wounded man at the expiration of two hours. He had but little fever, while his strength was not greatly impaired by his injuries. His benefactor killed a prairie-chicken, and, roasting it, gave him such portions as were tender and palatable, and least likely to disturb the system. He obeyed the hunter with the docility of a child, but gave no indications of returning reason. The hemorrhage from his wound had been slight; but a closer examination showed a deep indentation in the skull, which convinced Pathaway that he could be no better, in a mental point of view, without the aid of skillful surgery. He reared a temporary shelter, and passed the long night with his patient, watching every symptom, and doing everything that his limited means would allow for his comfort.

In the morning, still less fever remained, and Pathaway determined to return with him, by easy stages, to Nick Whiffles' hut. He walked very well. The birds and the sunshine pleased him; he heard with delight the songs of the feathered choristers, and smiled when the golden rays, warm and sportive, fell upon his face. He muttered about rivers and mountains, lakes and prairies, trappers and peltries; but there was no coherency in his wandering fancies. Pathaway called his attention to the lake as they passed it; he stretched out his hands, and manifested a momentary interest, but it was evanescent as smoke. He next pointed to the timber, but with no better results. Despairing of drawing forth any signs of intelligence, Pathaway pursued the way toward Nick's hut, in a frame of mind far from cheerful. It was past noon when he reached it; and his disappointment was great on finding it deserted. There it stood, bare and inhospitable; there was no one at the door to give him a welcome, or light the friendly camp-fire. Nick had changed his quarters; for the free trapper, in dangerous neighborhoods, seldom camps many days in the same place, and sometimes is compelled to seek a new camping-ground nightly.

Pathaway picked up a piece of birch bark in the hut, with unique characters printed upon it with charcoal, in crooked capitals:

GONE TO THE NORTH. SEED SIGNS OF A PISON DIFFIKILTY.

The execution of this rather vague announcement was such that Pathaway could not repress a smile. Nick's early education had clearly been of a hurried and imperfect kind, which fact was sufficiently attested by the zig-zag cut of his letters, and the peculiarity of his spelling. It was too late in the day, and the wounded man was too much fatigued for a new tramp, based upon instructions so meagre; so the gray hunter made preparations to remain there till the next day. While he was thus employed, he heard the baying of a dog, and looking out, saw Nick approaching through the cottonwoods, mounted, and attended by one of his dogs. It was a pleasant surprise.

"I forgot somethin', and come back arter it," said the trapper, "and it's lucky I did, prehaps. Got back sooner'n you expected, I reckon. Hillo! who ye got there—one of our kind, I s'pose?"

Nick dismounted, shook hands with Pathaway, then turning to the wounded trapper, said:

"How'd 'e do, stranger? You're welcome to my hut; and 'tisn't mine, either, 'cause I deserted it; but you're safe here, and not altogether safe, neither; for there's a pesky sight of danger hereabouts from both red and white."

"Mountains, beavers, otters, traps, and lakes!" said the wounded trapper, with a meaningless stare.

"Jes' so, brother—jes' so! That's clear Ingin, and not so clear, arter all. Been out on your own hook, I allow?" returned Nick, with a puzzled look.

"Horses, halters, and horse-stealers!" muttered the trapper, listlessly.

"Zactly, mister, it's all right, I'll be bound, though I can't see the drift on't, by

mighty. Howsomnever, if you're disposed to make gammut of me, I don't keer no great about it, for they've ~~and~~ in the newspapers down in the clearin's, and done a heavy business with me in that line. I say, Pathaway, what's the matter with the feller's eyes? His face has a gone-away look, I allow."

"He has fallen among thieves," responded the gray hunter. He was shot at and robbed in a canon."

Pathaway related circumstantially the facts of the case, to which Nick listened with much interest.

"It's a cruel thing," he said, shaking his head, "to rob the honest trapper of his hard-earned gains; but when murder is added to robbery, it becomes a terrible thing. So this poor critter has lost the light o' reason. It's a mournful spettacolo to be an idiot, and that isn't jest the farm, either; but you know what I mean, which makes it all the same. Honest men allers understan' each other, though the words mayn't all be fitted into place like the bricks in a buildin'. I had a relation that was a fool. And sich a fool as he was! O Lord, yes! He cried himself to death for the moon; but what he thought it was, and what he wanted to do with it, I dunno, by mighty! Perhaps he 'maged 'twas sunthin' to eat; I dare say!" added Nick, reflectively, unconsciously lowering his voice, "the poor, vacant critter thought 'twas sunthin' to eat. An idiot, you know, loves eatin' better nor a wise man does his sweet-heart."

The wounded man started, smiled sadly, then sang, in a voice inexpressibly plaintive, the following words:

"My sweetheart was a prairie-flower—
She dwelt beside the flowing water;
I stole by moonlight to her bower—
I loved a wandering trapper's daughter.
Oh, the trapper's daughter!"

"Her eyes were like soft star-beams gleaming,
Her mouth was small, her lips were sweet,
Her face was ever on me beaming—
I fell, and worshiped at her feet.
Oh, the trapper's daughter!"

The poor fellow sang these simple words with touching sweetness.

"The words sound nat'ral and sensible," observed Nick, "but he hasn't got back yet. It's mechanical; his mind has no more to do with it than the fiddle has to do with makin' the music, when it's in the hands of a skillful player. He's been in love, it 'pears, which took hold on him powerful. Doctor Whiffles had a case on't that nullified all his doctor stuff. 'Twas a woman, and the case was of three years' stannin', which made it—what the fakilty call—chronic. She lost a heap o' flesh, and in fact, parted with nighabout all on't. She kept herself so wet up with cryin', that she had to be wrung out every day as reg'lar as sunrise. Her sobs was like the soughin' of the wind through the defiles in the mountains when there's a tempest. She sung sich tetchin' ditties, that sev'ral of her sisters was so melted that they never was worth much arterwards. To cure her, the doctor was obleeged to marry her himself. 'Twas amazin' how she picked up her crumbs arter that. She weighed two hundred pounds and up'ards the last time I seed her. To look at her you'd never knowed that her heart had been broke."

"Oh, the trapper's daughter—
Oh, the trapper's daughter!"

sang the wounded man, catching up the chorus of his song, and prolonging it with his strangely melancholy intonations.

"That makes me feel bad, I swear to gracious!" Then to Pathaway, with emphasis, and gesticulating with his right hand: "This can't go on; it must and shall be stopped! These mountain robbers have had their way long enough. Nobody's safe—I a'n't, you a'n't, and he isn't. We can't tell when our turn'll come. We may be shot down like buflerler in the fast pass we come to."

"You say truly," answered Pathaway, earnestly. "These outrages must cease. This man's misfortune appeals to me with irresistible power; it strengthens a purpose by no means new. The mysterious banditti of Trapper Valley must be traced to their kennel, and made to feel that they cannot commit crime with impunity, even in the wilderness."

"They're too lazy to work like honest trappers and hunters. They scorn the slow process of trappin' beaver and otter, choosin' to pounce upon the hard-earned gains of others, rather than encounter the dangers and toils of

the reg'lar business. But see! he's flushin' up. The worriment of walkin', together with his wound and other injuries, has produced fever, which mustn't be neglected. We'll put him on to Shagbark, and be off."

"Shagbark?" repeated Pathaway, inquiringly.

"This fine animile!" responded Nick, stroking his horse's mane. "He's carried me through thick and thin, and he'll carry him. For speed, nothin' can tetch him. Wouldn't 'magine it, would ye? Notice them legs—look like pipe-stems, but they're powerful strong, and move like drumsticks when you git 'em started. He's taken me from danger more nor once; and it'll be a sad day for us both when we part. Come, my friend, we want ye to ride. I'll give ye a helpin' hand to mount. That's it—quite strong, a'n't ye? Now, take the reins—all right! Now, we'll toddle along nicely."

The trapper, after being assisted to the saddle, was visibly pleased with the change. It revived, for the instant, old recollections.

"Horses and running water, green grass and trees, prairies and buffaloes. Bring up the peltrics. Where's the pistols? Take care of the chasms there!" he muttered, then looked wishfully at Nick, who replied, soothingly:

"Everything's jest as you want it. Hold on fast, and I'll lead the hoss—and I won't lead him, neither, for he'll foller me like a dog."

So saying, Nicholas led the way, while Pathaway walked beside the trapper, to steady him if his strength failed.

Shagbark manifested great sagacity in going down steep declivities and up rough ascents, never stumbling or making a misstep. If his master unconsciously got too far in advance, he admonished him of the fact by a low whinny. As they went along, they saw a grizzly bear perched upon a cliff, looking down upon them. They passed beneath him unmolested, while Smuggler, instead of manifesting fear or a disposition to worry him, trotted quietly along at Nick's heels. Pathaway scrutinized it sharply, but made no remark. To meet Bruin in that country was not an uncommon occurrence, yet there was something peculiar in the fixed position of this one. Pathaway grew more thoughtful; his gaze wandered oftener to his guide—he was beginning to see traits in the man worthy of study, and which were fast awakening interest and curiosity. Glancing backward for a parting view of the bear, he saw him clambering over dizzy heights and close to the brinks of precipices. Had Nick been near enough, the gray hunter would probably have called his notice to the cool audacity of the animal, which kept in sight till they reached the place of their destination, and were greeted by the great voice of Misfortune and the pleasanter one of Sebastian, who, having heard the story of the wounded trapper's calamity, manifested an amiable disposition to render his condition as comfortable as possible. If the youth had never before shown address and quickness, in Pathaway's estimation he now manifested those qualities. He performed things so deftly—his touch smoothed the couch of the unfortunate so adroitly, and with such earnest goodwill and sympathy.

"The boy'll do for him almost as well's a woman," said Nick, with pride. "I've trained him to be reg'lar handy about the camp. Sich cookin' as he'll do, and out o' nothin', neither, and not nothin' either, 'cause it's ginerly bufferler and other things, and not so much other things as bufferler. It's a knack; some folks has knacks and some hasn't. Jes' give him a little salt and a perarie-chicken, and he'll make a dish fit for a president or a sick man; and 'tisn't a dish, neither, for we ha'n't got a dish, by mighty. Don't own nothin' in the housekeepin' line but a stew-pan and a camp-kettle. But that's enough for him; he'd make a turkle-soup in a piece o' birch-bark if he on'y had the turkle. Don't foller his legs round quite so sharp, stranger, 'cause he's rather modest, and 'll think sunthin's the matter of 'em."

"You seem to be very fond of him, my friend?" observed Pathaway, noticing the admiring glances he threw upon the boy.

"Yes, in part, in part!" quoth Nick, in a matter-of-fact manner, "and not so much in part as in other ways. Then," he added, pursuing his former train of thought, "there's a brile—you never see sich a boy for a brile."

The subject of these encomiums was seen to

avert his face, and Pathaway thought he laughed. Perhaps he overheard the flattering things his friend was saying of him.

"He's so like my step-mother, who used to brile, and stew, and roast, and finally briled, stewed, and roasted herself into her grave. He can shoot an arrer, can Sebastian. He can hit an object of consider'ble magnitude at a short distance. He strikes a beautiful attitude when he shoots; there's a good 'eal in that, you know, for it brings out the nat'ral cemetery of the systum—also of the legs."

"The man has considerable fever, Uncle Nick!" said Sebastian, approaching.

"I observed it, my lad, and I'm glad it's fever instead o' consumption; for I know how to treat a fever, and I don't consumption. I know sartin roots and yarbs that are p'ison on fever. I'll set right off arter 'em, and we'll have 'em biled up in a twinklin'!"

Nicholas took his gun and hatchet, and started on this benevolent mission. He came back, staggering under a load of medicinal plants, some of which had attained the size of respectable bushes.

"I got a little more nor I wanted, jes' to show a strong front to the enemy; though we musn't give him so much that the fever won't have room to turn. A fever wants a little elbow-room, in course."

Talking in his genial and humorous way, Nick assorted the remedies, and instructed Sebastian how to prepare and administer them, although his notions were rather exaggerated in regard to quantity—a fallacy which Sebastian had much trouble in correcting. But the plants, made into a decoction, and given to the patient, really had a salutary effect. A gentle perspiration broke out upon the surface of the body, his restlessness gradually subsided; and anon he slept peacefully, unconscious of himself and all the world.

CHAPTER X.

TRAPPER VALLEY.

The next day, after the morning meal, and an earnest conversation with Sebastian, Nick prepared to leave camp. Pathaway asked him where he was going, when he proceeded to speak of Pontneuf, whose capture by the outlaws, he affirmed, had occasioned him much anxiety.

"I'm goin'," he went on to say, "to explore Trapper Valley—though I warrant it'll be slow work. There's a hunderd places where a thousan' men could hide 'thout diffikilty. The sides of the mountain are full of rifts and caves, which can be diskivered on'y by s'archin'; and when found, it would bother one to go to 'em ag'in of a dark night."

"Nicholas," interposed Sebastian, "you are going to expose yourself to danger. Do not rashly put your life in the power of those lawless men."

"It's an arrand of marcy, Sebastian. Think of Pontneuf and his darter—especially of the darter," replied Nick, with a sigh of commiseration.

"I have thought, Uncle Nick," answered Sebastian, quickly. "It is terrible!—it makes me shiver! But you cannot reach her—I know you cannot."

"It looks onpossible, and not onpossible, neither—for chance favors folks a thousand times when they don't expect it. If we should despair and give up when a thing looks hard, nothin' would be done, I allow. I knowed an instance," he added, impressively, "where a person e'en almost despaired; but that individooal waited, and he done a thing that'll alers rejoice his heart—that'll be a comfort to him—a life-long comfort."

The youth took the trapper's hand, and replied:

"It is a good and generous spirit that prompts you. If I could attend you and share the dangers, I wouldn't complain, Uncle Nick."

Then to Pathaway, who was regarding this scene with interest:

"I'm obliged to take care of Uncle Nicholas—he'd run straight into danger if 'twasn't for me—though, in a case of this kind, it don't seem right to oppose him. I hope, sir, that you'll not allow him to go alone. Two, it appears to me, would incur less risk than one."

"Certainly I'll go," responded Pathaway. "It is a case that enlists my sympathy. When woman is in danger, man must not pause to reason."

"He's a knowin' and a safe man, but I'm

afear'd to leave you alone, Sebastian. They've diskivered my old camp, and they'll find this. Should they come while I'm gone, what would become on ye?"

The youth's brown cheeks paled, and an involuntary shiver shook his person.

"Clearly, he has a great horror of these outlaws," remarked Pathaway, regarding the boy closely.

"Yes," answered Nick, hastily; "he's afear'd of 'em, for they give him a right smart fright, once—though, fortinitly, he got away from 'em by runnin' like an Ingin—and he didn't run, neither, for he was mounted on my hoss—and, come to think on't, 'twasn't my hoss, but his'n."

"A race for life?" said Pathaway.

"It was; but he got away, as you see," answered the trapper.

"Leave the dogs with me, and I shall do very well," said Sebastian.

"Sartin, and I'll try and not be gone long. Take good care of the sick man and don't be afear'd. 'Tisn't fur to Trapper Valley, and one or both of us 'll come back afore night."

"Then go: the dogs will take care of me, and I can shoot very well, too, you know."

Nick started once or twice, going back as often to give additional advice or instruction; fairly on the way, he seemed to lose his anxiety for the youth, which gave place to the excitement of his new and hazardous undertaking. He was not very sanguine that he should be successful, but was confident that a careful survey of the Valley might shed additional light upon its mysteries. On this occasion he intended to make the attempt in open daylight, and trust to his experience and sagacity for eluding observation and detection.

They arrived at the Devil's Gate without accident, having made the necessary descent with that degree of cautiousness that circumstances demanded. Nick crossed the portals of the gate, followed by Pathaway—who was particularly struck with the formation of the place, especially the basaltic shafts and the tunnel-like passage. Having encountered before the difficulties of this entrance, Nick had now less trouble than his companion in overcoming them. They reached the boiling spring, which Nick named the "Devil's Camp-Kettle."

Pursuing their way, they scaled great rocks, swung themselves across chasms, and finally reached the stream of water spoken of by the Shoshoné. Crossing this on the stones, they found themselves in a strip of timber of considerable extent. The Valley was not very wide at that point; but farther on, it stretched out to the right and left.

Nick suddenly stopped, and Pathaway, looking up, saw a grizzly bear a few yards in advance of them. The bear turned around and growled, manifesting a decided disposition to dispute their progress.

"It looks like the one we saw last night," said Pathaway.

"Bears are as thick as blackberries, hereabouts, at this season of the year," said Nicholas.

"This is not a very safe place for bruin," said the gray hunter, scrutinizing the bear, closely.

"I know it, mister; but the critters haven't got no discretion. It must be a young bear, or it 'd never make its way to Trapper Valley. But, then, the varmints are good for climbin', and can scramble up the mountain a pesky sight quicker'n you nor I can. But see: he don't 'pear willin' to let us pass, so we'll jes' turn to the right and shift over toward t'other side."

"A very dogmatic bear," rejoined Pathaway.

"Yes; and I told him so t'other day. Sez I: 'You're nothin' but an overgrown dog.'"

Pathaway smiled.

The trapper struck off in the manner proposed, leaving bruin to enjoy his supremacy.

"That resembles your tame bear," Pathaway remarked.

"Summat—summat," quoth Nick, carelessly; "but he's a good 'eal bigger; and not bigger, either, but a size smaller. The varmint that I had b'longed to an Ingin friend o' mine, who took him off the Lord on'y knows where."

"I perceive that I was mistaken!" said Pathaway, drily.

The parties had proceeded about a hundred rods when a strange spectacle met their sight. It was a man, mounted upon a horse, his hands tied behind him, and a rope about his neck.

which rope was fastened to a limb overhead. They hastened to examine this singular object. That the person had been in this position a considerable time, was quite obvious. The horse, pinched with hunger, had gnawed the grass down to the roots, and eaten the lower branches of the trees as far as he could stretch his neck. The poor animal stood with head depressed, presenting a most melancholy figure, with his distinctly-defined ribs and gaunt outlines. The unfortunate individual on his back was in a still sorrier plight. His face was haggard, his eyes bloodshot, and his expression as hopeless as despair could render it.

"*En nom Dieu* have pity on me, gentlemen!" he exclaimed, in a faint voice.

Pathaway sprang forward and cast the noose from his neck. The revulsion from horror to hope was too great; the man gasped—two hot tears coursed down his ghastly cheeks, and he fell senseless into the arms of the hunter, who immediately placed him upon the ground, while Nick ran for some water, which he brought in his cap and dashed upon him.

"He's gone, I do believe!" said the trapper. "And that poor animal under the tree has stood stock still in his tracks two whole days, I'll be bound! See how his feet have worn into the sile by a constant takin' 'em up and puttin' 'em down! Now, isn't that what ye call patience and obedience to the will o' man? I'll wager my rifle that this poor feller's his master, and that they've growed attached to each other by long companionship. For *faithfulness*, give me a hoss, I say! I love a hoss, by gracious!"

"I'm with you, heart and soul! The horse is a noble animal. Heavens! what tortures both man and beast have suffered during the long, dreary, and frightfully monotonous hours they have been here!" answered Pathaway, with warmth.

"He don't come out on't. 'Twas too sudden—the relief was. It has done his business quicker nor the rope."

"His heart beats—there's a tremulous motion of the pulse—a slight swelling of the throat—a faint flush upon his hollow cheeks. His eyes unclosed—pour some water upon his lips."

The man came back to consciousness with a sobbing sigh, and a thrill and quiver of the limbs, as the first wave of memory dashed upon his brain.

"He musn't see the horse nor the tree," said Pathaway, considerably.

"I allow not. The sight would bring back too forcibly the recollection of his awful difficulty. I'll lead the faithful hoss to the water while you tend to his master."

"Go on, and I'll carry the unfortunate fellow in my arms till he is able to help himself a little!"

Pathaway lifted the man with ease, and bore him after Nick until he had reached the stream, by which time he was quite conscious. The hunter then mixed some spirits and water, which the sufferer swallowed with famishing avidity. A hard biscuit that Nick had in his pocket, softened in the stream, was then given him, which he devoured with that greedy haste that characterizes every stage of starvation. The horse, meanwhile, was quenching his thirst with the clear, running water.

"No more—no more!" said Nicholas. "Too much on't, arter a starve, isn't no better for hosses nor 'tis for men."

Still compassionate and true to his kindly nature, the trapper divided his remaining biscuits with the horse; and surely the animal was grateful—he expressed it in his eyes and ears, and in the manner in which he rested his neck upon Nick's shoulder and whinnied.

"Don't talk to me about animals!" cried Nick. "I've studied 'em, and I know 'em. I've summered and wintered with 'em; feasted and starved, slept and waked with 'em; tended 'em when they're sick, and cussed be the man who beats his hoss!"

He struck himself upon the hip, and looked upward, confident that strong language would be forgiven on such a subject, then his face beamed mildly and lovingly upon the horse, and he thought how many miles he had been carried by his brethren.

Pathaway began to admire Nick Whiffles—there was tenderness and simplicity in him—and those virtues cover a multitude of human sins. He who cannot feel for a beast is a beast.

"The friend of the hoss and the dog is the friend of everybody. He who abuses one or 'other, will abuse all human kind. Them

is my sentiments, by mighty!"

"Mon Dieu!" said the owner of the horse. "Is that you, Neek Wheelies, or is this one grand dream—one ver' great deception?"

"Pontneuf, I swear to gracious! I didn't know ye—the condemned hangin' has took the nat'ralness all out of ye!"

The voyageur grew pale at the mention of hanging, and nervously put his hand to his neck, around which was a purple line distinctly defined, the cord having been drawn straight, so that the least motion to the right or left, or any direction, produced a degree of strangulation.

"I heerd about your misfortin, and he and I ventured into the Valley to see if we could git any clue of your whereabouts. I'm afeard to ask ye about Nanny. 'Tisn't a subject that can be pleasant to ye. But there'll be time enough; you can tell the whole story arter we git ye out o' this condemned onnat'ral place. But we must leave the hoss, though I hate to have ye part with the critter, because he didn't part with you when partin' would a been sartin death to ye. There isn't no help for't, but there's plenty o' grass and water, and 'tisn't like leavin' him to starve."

Nicholas took Pontneuf upon his shoulders and carried him across the stream.

"Put me down, *mon ami*; you s'all take hold my arm, and I will walk. My legs is ver' weak and cramp; I set so long—so ver' long! I zank you, Monsieur Neek Wheelies."

The trapper placed Pontneuf upon his feet, but his limbs were so stiff and paralyzed that he could make no progress; so Nick carried him again. Looking back after making their way a considerable distance, Pathaway perceived, much to his surprise, that the voyageur's horse was following, which circumstance he communicated to its owner.

"*Bon cheval! bon cheval!* he foller me every where as I s'all go. He will not leave me ne vare, ne vare!" said Pontneuf, earnestly.

"The critter'll break his neck if he isn't pesky keeful. It's about as much as humans can do to steer themselves over these rocks. Hold on to me tight, old boy, and I'll git ye out o' this little diffikilty afore long. Here's the Devil's Camp-Kettle, and a few steps ahead is Devil's Gate."

Assisted by Pathaway, and lightening the task by his cheery remarks, Nick emerged in safety from the dark tunnel, and placed his friend on firmer and smoother footing. While resting, they heard the horse neigh, and presently the creature appeared uninjured, apparently, by slip or fall.

Pontneuf staggered to meet his favorite, and throwing both arms around his neck, hugged him, and shed tears; while the animal returned these caresses by low, expressive whinnies that could not be misinterpreted.

"His bones begin to show," quoth Nick "but bones wont hurt a hoss, as long as they're in jints; but if they're all in one piece, the critter would be stiff-like and onpliable."

Pathaway turned inquiringly to Nick, but the latter's peculiar visage was so quiet and honest, that he was puzzled to know whether he was in jest or earnest. Each, taking an arm of the voyageur, helped him up the ascent, and in half an hour they were clear of the mysterious precincts of Trapper Valley. Pontneuf glanced back at it with a shudder. He was thinking of what he had suffered—and of his daughter Ninon. A thousand distressing thoughts went whirling through the voyageur's brain; he pictured his darling girl in the outlaw lair, subjected to indignities that wrung his paternal nature. He fell upon his face and gave himself up to emotions that were not dishonorable to him as a man and a father. He was permitted to indulge in this outburst of grief without interruption. Calmer for the internal storm, and his spirit washed and purified, as it were, with tears, he arose.

"Ah, *Messieurs—mes bons Messieurs*, you must pardon me ver' much! I cry like one child. I nevere was so weak, nevere! Oh! *ma jolie Ninon!*"

"You are understood—you are understood," said Pathaway, sympathetically. "The sternness that had rested upon his features for the last few moments, relaxing."

"She's worth cryin' for, the gal is, but we must try and do somethin' better nor to cry for her; though I think more on ye, Pontneuf, for doin' it. But we must go on; Sebastian will be expectin' us, and I don't keer to expose the lad to fright and danger. He's young, you know"—to Pathaway—"the boy is amazin' young."

They resumed their way, and were passing the cliffs previously mentioned, when the ubiquitous grizzly bear was desiered in a mesquit thicket quite near them.

"Ah!" exclaimed Pathaway, "that mysterious bear again!"

The bear arose straight upon his hind feet and moved his fore paws as if swimming in the air. The circumstance struck the voyageur as being very extraordinary.

"Flat on your faces in the wormwood!" cried Nick, with unusual vehemence, and suiting the action to the mandate, stretched the Frenchman upon the earth with unceremonious quickness. "There's the unlucky hoss!" he muttered, much annoyed.

"Do not give yourself some pain; I can manage him *parfaitement*. Down, Daphnis, down!" said the Frenchman, rising upon his elbow.

The horse immediately sank upon his knees, then upon his shoulders, as if in the act of rolling, then quietly settled upon his side, and was quite still, with his large, brown eyes fixed on his master.

"What did you see?" whispered Pathaway.

"Nothin'," answered Nick.

"You heard something?" added the hunter.

"No," replied Nicholas, "I didn't hear nor see nothin' neither, but I know there's diffikilty ahead, if we don't look sharp. I can tell by my feelin's when there's danger in the neighborhood; and not by my feelin's, either, so much as by other things."

Pathaway lifted his head carefully to take a second look at the bear, but he had disappeared.

By and by they heard the clattering of hoofs, and after waiting in a state of suspense about five minutes, a party of horsemen came into view from the western quarter, and rode onward to the east in a line parallel with Trapper Valley. They passed within ten rods of Nick and his companions, who were thus afforded a good opportunity for observation. The most striking figure of the group was a young woman, who rode with peculiar ease and boldness, and, in fact, took the lead of the cavalcade. Her dress was of a character so uncommon, that it is a matter of difficulty to describe it; but in effect, it was picturesque, with a touch of wilderness wildness. The person of the female *equestrienne* was not large, but shapely and agreeable to the eye. From the waist upward, her figure was distinctly outlined by her close-fitting habit of red cloth, the glare of which was relieved by stripes of black. She wore upon her head a dark cap with long, red plumes, that swayed gracefully to and fro to the motions of the body. Her hands were covered with black gauntlets, but whether those hands were small, Pathaway was too far distant to determine; neither could he decide respecting the beauty of her features, but was inclined to believe them handsome. Whether Nick's eyes were sharper, or whether he was more partial to the sex, we do not know; but he affirmed with the greatest confidence that she was as "pooty as a pictur!" He shook his head as he said it, and looked inquiringly at the voyageur, who was seized with a sudden fit of trembling, and laid closer to the ground.

The men who followed in the train of the young woman were ten in number, of a hybrid appearance. In short, they had that rough and swaggering air that marked them of lawless habits and adventurous fortunes. Their equipments and habiliments corresponded with those that Pathaway had seen in the canon.

"'Tis Carlota!" whispered the Frenchman, in a disturbed manner; "Carlota, the outlaw's daughter."

"I thought so," muttered Nick. "I was e'namost sartin they was birds of a feather. There must be another entrance to the Valley, accessible by both man and beast."

"You are right, *mon frere*. There is an entrance far below; they took me through it, but it was in the night, and ver' dark. We followed what they called the Trapper Trace. Then, *le diable!* who s'all know where we went?"

Carlota and her followers were now hidden from view. The parties arose from their recumbent position, and pursued their way toward Nick's new camp.

CHAPTER XI.

SEBASTIAN HAS VISITORS.

After the departure of Nick and Pathaway, the wounded trapper arose; and Sebastian led him out into the sunshine, in the golden

brightness of which he still manifested a childish pleasure. There was a large tree just back of the camp, beneath which the youth spread Nick's blanket, and upon which his patient reclined. He gazed up into the sky with strange curiosity, and at every object around him, as if they were new revelations, and had but now burst upon his senses. Cool breezes, wafted from the mountain-sides, loaded with the breath of trees and flowers, swept gently across his face, refreshing him with their balminess, moving the dark locks upon his temples. His past world had faded from his memory, and the one he now lived in was infantile and full of novelty. The past, with him, was dim, fragmentary, and chaotic, like one's recollections of the scenes of infancy and half-forgotten childhood. Yet there must have been fitful flashes of his former existence among mountains and streams, upon lakes and prairies, and of a love that, at some period, had absorbed his thoughts, and influenced the actions of his life; for Sebastian, as he returned to the camp, heard him singing:

"My sweet-heart was a prairie-flower—
She dwelt beside the flowing water;
I stole at midnight to her bower—
I loved a wandering trapper's daughter:
Oh! the trapper's daughter!"

The words and the plaintive voice affected the youth. He sighed, and tears started to his eyes. His breast heaved like a woman's. There was much tenderness in the boy. Possibly, the voice was like one he had heard somewhere; who knows? There are a thousand things that make us sad without our knowing why. Sometimes a single tone makes us thrill. Why is it? Because it connects us mysteriously with the past.

How inexplicable is that passion which even the extinction of reason cannot smother; that will break out like hidden fire, glow up a moment with a touch of its former fervor, and then die away like the transient flame of a wisp of burning flax!

The mournful chorus followed Sebastian to the hut: "Oh! the trapper's daughter!"

"Wondrously like!" murmured the lad. "The same mouth; the same reflective eyes and massy brow; and," he added, thoughtfully, "has loved a trapper's daughter!"

The boy fell into a fit of musing; it became him, too; for his face had a touching beauty, rendered yet more beautiful by the drooping wing of Melancholy.

Brightening, by-and-by, he called the dogs and fed them—talking to them, meanwhile, as if they were creatures capable of comprehending human speech.

"Smuggler, you are over-modest. Take that bit; it is for you. Misfortune, you are overbearing; you are what, among men, is called a tyrant. Eat what I give you, and be content. You have a bad name, sir—but little better than your former one; though Calamity and Misfortune mean much the same thing. I wish uncle Nick would still call you Calamity; for I like not to be followed by a dog called Misfortune—a dog that follows a great many people. Old friends are you and Nicholas! He has told me a great many stories about you—how faithful you have been to him, and how many 'sondemned little diffikities' you both got into and got out of. You don't look like an old dog, either. And as for beauty—ah! you're not handsome, sir—you're not handsome! You are shaggy, and look sour, and never wag your tail on anybody but Nick and me. But thou art a very honest dog—a very honest dog, indeed!"

"Wah! wah!"

It was a rough voice that uttered these sounds—a voice that made Sebastian turn with a convulsive start. Two men entered the hut—Ben Joice and Zene Beck—who, though often bickering and quarreling, were kindred natures, and hunted in couples.

"Ingin boy—half-breed—alone in camp—eat him up—swallow him whole. Ugh! ugh!" added Ben Joice, imitating the Indian style of communication, and assuming a threatening aspect for the purpose of playing upon the lad's fears, who drew back toward the dogs and stood motionless as a statue.

"Young—tender—build fire—roast him. Wah!" continued Ben, making a horribly ugly face.

Zene Beck, perceiving that Sebastian seemed ready to fall down with terror, burst into a loud laugh.

"White men—great chiefs—mighty warriors—half-Ingin boy prisoner—go with us—walk prairies—slow fire—huru—bain-wa-wa—"

added Ben.

"There! Stop, Ben, or you'll frighten the little yaller varmint to death." Then to Sebastian: "Fly round, you half-breed spawn, and cook somethin' to eat. There's a piece o' bufferler; knife it off in a minute and put it to the fire," said Zene Beck.

"Not too fast. Who keeps camp?" said Ben.

Sebastian tried to speak, but at first his voice was so low as to be inaudible.

"Speak up, you chicken! What's the matter, eh? Don't ye know anything?" growled Ben, making an ominous rattling with his weapons.

"Nick Whiffles!" said Sebastian, distinctly. Joice and Beck exchanged glances. It was clear that they did not relish this information. Zene scowled and shook his head.

"Pooh! pooh!" exclaimed Joice. "Ain't afeard of a name, be ye? Don't care no more for Nick Whiffles nor I do for a bufferler calf. Let's sarch round and see if he's got anything drinkable 'bout the premises."

"I advise you not to meddle much among Uncle Nick's things," said Sebastian, whose emotions did not appear to arise from a real spirit of cowardice.

"Zene, masticate that little yaller boy! Bone him—bolt him! I'll take a peep under this pile o' boughs, and in the corners ginerly. Sich critters as this lank Nick Whiffles allers keep some choice sperrits agin accidents."

Joice went feeling about in every corner of the camp, and finally lighted upon a keg of whisky, which Nick had kept carefully for urgent occasions. He gave a loud whoop at this discovery, with a long addition of cratted Indian, which was finally choked off by a stream of the much-prized liquor, which went down his throat with that peculiar sound characteristic of drinking from such a vessel. After a frightful draught, he passed the keg to Beck, smacked his lips, drew the sleeve of his hunting-shirt across his beard, and having enjoyed the flavor a moment in silence, asked Sebastian: "Where's he gone? When'll he come back?"

Understanding him to refer to Nick, Sebastian replied that he would return soon.

"Then we must hurry up. Fix the fire and go to cookin', you smoothed-skinned half-and-half! Step quick, too. I cut a young Ingin's ears off once for not steppin' quick enough."

"Don't threaten me," answered Sebastian, pointing at the dogs.

"Bah! 'Spect I'm afeard of a couple o' pups! I've fit with grizzly bears, I have; clinched right in with 'em on equal terms, with no weapons but my teeth and nails. I'll take the varmint by the scruff of their necks, and hold 'em up as I would a couple o' kittens, and knock their heads together wounded hard, too!"

"That dog"—pointing to Misfortune, whose back was bristling, and whose eyes were flaming with mischief—"but waits my command to tear you in pieces!" answered Sebastian, with sudden spirit.

"Hoity-toity! My son John!" exclaimed Ben, with much affected humor, but prudently falling back a little from the neighborhood of Misfortune.

"The homely cuss does look ugly," said Zene, setting down the keg and retreating, also. "Don't let's make a row till we've had our grub. Arter we git through with that, we'll look round for the spiles; and I warn ye, aforehand, that I'll stan' no gammon about the division."

As it happened, Zene placed the keg upon the spot where both had previously laid their rifles. The dogs, as if by mutual agreement, seeing their master's property endangered, posted themselves by the keg, one on each side, Misfortune crouching directly upon the rifles. The ruffian-trappers did not observe this movement at the time, nor did they see Sebastian when he made a motion toward them with his hand.

"You want something to eat; I have no objection to cooking it, provided you will be quiet. Give me your hunting-knife"—to Joice—"and I'll cut some nice slices from this hump."

The fellow threw his hunting-knife at Sebastian's feet, who picked it up, and after sawing away at the hump a few minutes, complained that it was dull, and asked Beck for his; the latter gave him the implement, growling at his tardiness. He then cut the meat quickly, but did not return the knives. He addressed himself to the task assigned him with seeming

alacrity, and his lawless and uninvited guests were speedily employed in masticating large and delicious steaks of buffalo hump. Presently, as a natural consequence, they grew thirsty; and Ben arose to look for the keg of whisky, and saw two sets of threatening eyes fixed upon him; while the vessel that contained the devoted treasure was lying between them.

CHAPTER XII.

WHICH TREATS OF VARIOUS MATTERS.

The drenching draught that Ben Joice had swallowed was operating upon his brain, arousing what was vicious within him, making him valorous, boastful, and ready to quarrel with whoever or whatever might be disposed to take offence at his conduct. He stared at the dogs with stupid wonder, then with fierce and fast kindling ire. He took a hesitating and experimental step forward, but the prestige of the dog Misfortune became so ominous that he paused, doubting the propriety of a farther advance. Finding that he could use his tongue with less danger than his feet, he emptied upon them from his lawless mouth a torrent of invective of which persons of his type only are master; but which, so far from intimidating his canine opponents, served but to inflame their ferocity. They arose warily to their feet, and displayed their teeth in concert.

"Don't provoke them, if you value life!" said Sebastian, warningly.

Joice stepped back, brimming with wrath. To rob a wild, free trapper of his whisky, especially when under its influence is to give mortal offence. His keen and whetted appetite longs for the maddening potion, and brooks not patiently the thwarting of his desires. Ben felt in his belt for a pistol, but discovered, to his chagrin, that the weapon was not there.

"Give me your pistols, Zene, and I'll fix them ere brutes quicker'n an Ingin can take a skulp!"

Joice stretched his hand backward without taking his eyes from the dogs.

"Left 'em at camp," answered Zene. "Bill Brace wanted 'em."

"Curse the luck! I left mine, too. That's allers the way; when you want a thing you ha'n't got it. Look at them confounded pups, will ye? They're layin' right on our weapons, and there's that keg o' sperrit right atween 'em."

"Pups! precious nice pups! bull-dogs, I should say. Now look here, Ben; I've heerd of Nick Whiffles' dogs. That savagerous lookin' one is the same critter that he used to call Calamity, I'll bet two hoss-loads o' peltries! He's an awful varmint, and I shouldn't care to tackle him if I had forty pistols. Hillo! where's my knife?"

Zene felt for his favorite weapon.

"You little mixed-up Ingin heathen, where's my knife?" he asked, turning threateningly to Sebastian, who had edged toward the dogs, and now stood beside them.

"A trick! a trick!" cried Joice, furiously. "Toss 'em here, you traitor! Don't play with the grizzly's claws, 'less you want to be tore to pieces."

Ben swelled out his chest, scowled, and distorted his mouth to subdue the boy with fear; but he quietly held up the weapons in his right hand, saying, with a calmness that took them by surprise:

"Attempt to take them, and I'll launch these dogs upon you like lightning! I have only to exclaim, sharply, 'down with the brutes!' and they dart at you like panthers."

Ben Joice puffed the breath slowly from his dilated chest, stared a moment at Sebastian, and swallowing his rage, went slowly back to his meal. Though baffled, he was not conquered, and as he sent installment after installment into that craving gulf, the stomach, he growled between the mouthfuls, leering at the youth from under his beetling brows in a manner that boded no good.

Presently he began to talk with Zene in a fashion calculated to terrify the listener. His companion fell into his vein, and as the liquor worked more potently, they told frightful stories, and boasted of their lawless exploits in the mountains; of bloody feuds with brother trappers; of unprovoked encounters with the Indians, and finally of robberies and assassinations in the lonely passes, closing with an unfeeling allusion to the man they had shot in the cañon.

"We'd had a fine time at cuttin' and slashin' if Cap'n Dick hadn't interfered," remarked Joice. "A devil of a boy is Cap'n Dick!"

He'll have his own way, if it costs a man or two."

"Don't talk of our quarrel, because you're in the wrong, Ben. I've been sorry, sometimes that we did that. A smart trapper was Andrew Jeanjean. I knowed him several years ago. He 'peard a hearty, honest chap; allers quiet enough, if you minded your business and didn't meddle with his'n. I b'longed to a brigade with him a short time, and that was the way I happened to know him. We had a little trouble once, for he 'cused me of takin' beaver and otter from his traps, which," added Zene, ingenuously, "I sartinly did. I told him he lied, when he knocked me down without ceremony. If he hadn't done that, I don't think he'd be sleepin' down in the canon."

"Bah! there allers was a white stripe in you. You must l'arn to look upon these things as matters of business. We're the lords o' the aile, and all that don't b'long to our jolly boys is our prey, and must pay tribute to us. A conscience, Zene Beck, is a useless piece o' lumber to be totin' about in the mountains." Then turning his dogged eyes to Sebastian, added, still addressing Zene: "I'll git ye to go out, and dig a hole to put that sparrow-legged boy in."

The sparrow-legged boy, although very pale, was more self-possessed than could have been anticipated at the outset, and did not appear to heed this sinister observation. It must not be supposed that the anger of Joice had cooled; on the contrary, their villainous conversation had excited and rendered it more dangerous, though, perhaps, less impetuous. In fact, both the ruffians were racking their brains for an artifice or expedient by which to free themselves from their awkward dilemma.

"Poor Jeanjean!" said Beck, perceiving that this topic affected Sebastian. "I dreamed about him last night. But 'twas in the way o' business, as you say; and arter all, it don't make no great difference whether we pop over a buffaler or a man. Yahl yahl!"

Zene Beck suddenly thrust his head in the direction of Sebastian, and making a horrible face, perpetrated the last exclamations in a style that would have startled one unused to the freaks of free trappers. The boy recoiled.

"Wahl wahl!" vociferated Joice, with an explosiveness that was yet more alarming.

A slight thrill ran over the boy, but he grasped the knives more firmly.

There was a rustling of leaves, a crackling of twigs breaking beneath footsteps. A pale, haggard face presented itself at the door; the eyes were large, fixed, and expressionless. It was the wounded trapper. The bandage had slipped from his head, and there were fresh, red stains upon his hair around the wound.

The features of the ruffians blanched with horror. Believing that they saw before them the ghost of the murdered trapper, they sprang through the side of the camp as if its frail walls were pasteboard, and ran from the spot as if pursued by an avenging angel. Sebastian heard them bounding away with the speed of hunted buffaloes, and clasping his brow with his hands, stood motionless a long time. When, at length, he looked up, the wounded man had not changed his attitude, nor his stony vacancy of eye and face.

By-and-by he timidly approached the dogs, and as they did not repel his advances, he sat down by Smuggler, stroked his glossy coat with childlike satisfaction and curiosity. The instinct of the animals told them that Andrew Jeanjean was one to be dealt gently with. Occasionally he paused, as if a laggard ray of reason had overtaken him, but could find no fitting entrance to the temple of Understanding. Usually, when this occurred, he muttered, and sang snatches of "The Trapper's Daughter."

Sebastian, having in a measure recovered from his trepidation, looked out anxiously for Nick; but perceiving no welcome sign of his coming, consoled himself as best he could, under the circumstances.

"It's not time, yet," he said. "Trapper Valley is a long walk from here." Anon he added, complacently: "Am I never to lose sight of those fearful men? They pass before me like spectres. Their appearance revives recollections that fill me with terror. But I must struggle to be brave and cheerful on Nick's account as well as my own. Kind, quaint Nick! His presence makes me feel safe, and sometimes content—almost happy. And why not quite happy?" he continued, musingly.

The youth stopped, as if to find an answer to this question. He went on:

"Then comes this man Pathaway. What shall I say of this man Pathaway?"

Sebastian was troubled. This query perplexed him, apparently, more than the previous one. He stood with clasped hands and bent head, thinking of it a long time; then he paced slowly back and forth under the trees before the camp, pursuing, perhaps, the same train of thought, which was finally interrupted by the return of Nick and Pathaway, accompanied by the French voyageur.

"What's the diffikilty, little 'un?" inquired Nicholas, glancing about curiously. "Been makin' a hole in the side o' the camp, hain't ye? That's to let more oxygin in, I s'pose."

"I've had visitors, Nicholas," answered Sebastian, with a perceptible shiver. "Unwelcome guests, I assure you—Ben Joice and Zene Beck. They revived such—"

"Yes, I understan'!" interposed Nick. "They've frightened ye about to death, I'll be bound. I wish I'd been here, by mighty! Wouldn't they ketched it? Wouldn't they got sunthin'?" he added, raising his voice and his hands at the same moment, "wouldn't they got sunthin' that they never got afore, and wouldn't never had no need on ag'in? Did they hurt you, sonny? Did they lay a finger on ye, Humbug? If they did, jes' say the word, and my head shan't touch blanket ag'in till the mean skunks have got their deserts. Where was Smuggler? Where on airth was Misfortin'?"

"Present and faithful. They behaved nobly. They've been a credit to you, Uncle Nick. Look and satisfy yourself."

Sebastian pointed to the keg and the trapper's rifles.

The whole truth suggested itself to Nick at once. His kindly countenance beamed benevolently upon his canine friends.

"I have observed," said Pathaway, "that you display singular taste in the names of your dogs and horse."

Although the gray hunter addressed this remark to Nick, his attention was fixed upon Sebastian with a wondering, perplexed intensity that was almost painful.

"Yes," answered Nick, mildly, "I have my ideas. Everybody has his ideas. I change the names of my animiles, 'casionally, same as the Ingins change the names of their braves. That critter's name used to be Calamity; but arter I got into the p'ison newspapers, I changed it to Misfortin'."

At that moment, Portneuf, who had been carried by Daphnis the latter part of the way, caught sight of the wounded trapper, and evinced considerable surprise.

"Ah! what do I see! It is my ver' good friend, Andrew Jeanjean! *Mon Dieu*. I s'all be ver' much amaze. What has happen'?"

"This," said Nick to Sebastian, "is Portneuf the voyageur. We found him in a dreadful plight—with a rope round his neck, and his horse for his executioner. He was starvin' and sufferin' horribly. Look at him, sonny, and see what terrible goin's on there is down in Trapper Valley."

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed Sebastian.

"And, Ptoo, for that matter, and all the rest of the alphabet. A day or two in that position will put white threads in the blackest hair, I allow. But don't think on't—don't think on't! It's too much for a lad who's so ruined, as 'twere, by the scarlet fever; and not so much by the scarlet fever as by other things neither."

There was something in the tenderness with which Nick treated the boy, and the readiness with which he made excuses for his girlish weaknesses, that excited in a pre-eminent manner the interest of Pathaway. He had observed, as who would not, that the trapper's apologies were not always consistent, but almost without exception contradictory, and that he unconsciously mixed them with the ludicrous.

"Ninon?" queried Sebastian, earnestly.

Nicholas shook his head sorrowfully.

"Nothin' yet—nothin' yet, but we're all hopin' for the best; and," he added, philosophically, "when sevril people hope for a thing airnest, it's apt to happen. I've observed it time arter time, and the coincidence was startlin'; and not startlin' neither, but oncommon; and not so much oncommon," he continued, reverentially, in a lower voice, "as providential."

"Who is this Jeanjean?" asked Pathaway, addressing the voyageur.

"A trapper, and once a bourgeois. I knew him ver' well." Then to Jeanjean: "How do

you do, *mon friend*? Ah! how pale! I nevere s'all see you so pale!"

"Oh! the trapper's daughter—
Oh! the trapper's daughter!"

sang Jeanjean, in accents more plaintive than ordinary.

"I s'all be so—what you call him—astonish!" said Portneuf, quite bewildered by the strange manner of the trapper.

"He's been in a condemned little diffikilty; and not so little, neither, for it upset all his fakilities and nighabout snuffed the candle of his life," answered Nick, explanatorily. "You see a man afore ye that's been shot, exassinated, killed, buried, resurrectionized, and resufocated, all o' which happened in a lonesome canon not fur from Trapper Valley. This is the man"—pointing to Pathaway—"who did it; and that isn't what I mean, neither; but that he dug him up and brung him to. Sebastian, we must go to cookin'; for the Frenchman's stomach is as holler as a drum, and holler too; for a drum's full o' air, and I'll be hanged if he looks as if he had a thimble full on't to spare. Rattle out the camp-kettle and stew-pan, and mind and not hit 'em ag'in them brittle legs o' your'n. There's no Doctor Whuffles here to set bones. He was what is called a nat'ral bone-setter. Be in a hurry, lad, for we've got the condemndest stomach to cook for that ever darkened a camp-door. Our family's increasin', sonny. We'll have a hospital here by-and-by, by mighty! Spent a year in a hospital once, I did, when I's a boy, studyin' doctor stuff. That was down in the clearin's, afore I took to the bush. The hospital I was in was suntuimes called an Infarmity!"

"Infirmary," suggested Sebastian.

"Bliged to ye, little 'un. Remember the head of the 'stablishment very well. Seems as if I could see him smokin' his short pipe; for a confirmed smoker of the narcotic weed was the doctor. There wasn't his equal in tellin' stories, neither. To hear him, you'd think that he'd conquered all the disorders, complaints, maladies, eperdemies, plagues, 'ructions, and other sicknesses that humans is subject to. He hated minerils dreadful, and said that all sorts o' calomy—another slice, little 'un—red lead, blue-pill, and canine was p'ison to the system. Arter I'd been there awhile, the doctor used to let me try my hand at them that he was practicein' at. You'd oughter seen," added Nick, holding out the stew-pan in one hand, and a fagot in the other, "the fixin's he had in his infarmity—the hot baths, the cold baths, and the b'ilers; 'specially the b'ilers—steam-boxes he tarm'd 'um; but they's reg'lar b'ilers, by mighty! You see there's some affections—don't cut your fingers, sonny—that won't come out 'cept by b'ilin'. We used to bile 'em right smart! I got to be master b'iler afore three months. Well, as I's sayin'—don't step into the kittle, boy, and don't be lookin' at me so queer—he let me have a chance now and then at 'em. He happened to have 'mong his patients an Irishman with a bad leg, which was a fever-sore or somethin' o' that natur. The doctor had a good 'eal o' country practice, and was often gone a week at a time, like an old-fashioned Methodist minister on a circuit. This was about the time when the hot-crop system begun to be in vogue, which was many years ago. Now the doctor didn't go by guess-work, but allers had a plan which he follered. He cured everything with a Lobely course o' medicine, the botanic name of which was screw-anger. A course o' medicine was a 'metie, and a 'metie was a course o' medicine."

"'I'm goin' away,' sez the doctor, arter he'd showed me the patient."

"'Very well,' sez I."

"'This is a bad leg,' sez he."

"'It's a condemned bad leg!' sez I."

"'He must throw it up,' sez he."

"'Nothin' more nor less,' sez I."

"'Give him a 'metie every day till I git back,' sez he."

"'Will it 'feet the leg?' sez I."

"'Twon't 'feet nothin' else,' sez he. 'And be sure, to keep him in a horiz-tal position."

"'As horizontal as you please,' sez I. 'Then the doctor got into his wide one-legged gig, like that my gran'father traveled in in Centril Afriky, tetch'd up his old white hoss, and trundled away, saddle-bags, Lobely, kian, and all.'"

Nick gave the stew-pan a shake, and set it over the fire again.

"Well," he added, "I went at the critter. The doctor was gone sixteen days, and I puked

the patient every day, by mighty! Boy, put on another stick o' wood, and tend a little closter to your brile; a brile has to be looked arter."

"How did this treatment affect him?" asked Pathaway, with a half-smile.

"Powerful! powerful! 'Long toward the last on't I tied his well leg to the bed-post for fear the wrong one would come up. But not-stannin' all the skill I laid out on the onnateralized furriner, the lame limb didn't come up; but he fell away like p'ison durin' the time."

Nick gave the stew-pan an extra shake, glanced quizzically at Pathaway, then added, reflectively:

"But it oughter done his business! 'Twasn't no fault o' mine; I gin him enough o' the condemned stuff. There! that sparrow-legged boy has dropped his meat in the ashes! The doctor was summat astonished when he got home, for he didn't s'pect to be gone but a week when he went away. There was a little pucker, as 'twere, round the corners of his mouth when I told him what I'd done; but he lighted his pipe and smoked right on, as usual."

"I think I'm well qualified to practise doctor-stuff," sez I.

"I think you be," sez he, "but there's one piece o' information I want to give ye; which is, that all diseases is brung about by humors. No matter what a person complains on, depend on't 'tis humors."

"I'm everlastin'ly obleeged to ye," sez I, and the very next day left the doctor's infirmity, snatched that it wouldn't be safe for me to l'arn any more. Give me good food, good air, and good exercise, and I don't care for physic, by gracious! The human stomach never was intended for a slop-bowl."

Profoundly impressed with this idea, the trapper pondered a moment, and finished his train of thought by saying, with more than ordinary feeling, "Oh Lord, no!"

The gray hunter seemed not to notice Nick's closing remarks; his eyes wandered with the same perplexed and half-painful inquisitiveness from him to the youth, and from the youth to him; but they dwelt longest upon the youth.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FORLORN TRAPPER.

Nick's little camp was like a grain of sand in the wilderness—the ranges stretched so far; the prairies were so wide; the rivers and lakes so many; the borders of civilization so distant. The sun went down upon the solitary hut as if loth to lose sight of it and trust it alone in the darkness, its rays lingering tremulously upon the isolated threshold.

Portneuf was gaining strength and spirit under the ministrations of the trapper and Sebastian. He was beginning to relate his adventures with the outlaws of Tapper Trace, when the dogs sprang up and barked, and the grizzly bear appeared at the door. His coming was so unexpected that all save Nick were startled.

"Don't be skeerd!" said the trapper. "'Tis the Shoshonie's tame bear; got away from him, I allow. Guess I'll drive the critter home. Go 'long there, you varmint!"

Nicholas uttered these words hurriedly and with uncommon trepidation, for him—anxious, apparently, that the animal should not attract particular attention. Seizing the first convenient fagot, he ran from the camp, the bear retreating, growling before him. Very soon man and bear were out of sight and hearing. Nick was gone but a short time, returning somewhat cloudy and meditative, but perceiving that both Pathaway and Sebastian were watching him, he assumed to be very cheerful. It was no hard matter to see that he was taking unusual precautions concerning the safety of his horse, calling him in from his grazing grounds and fastening him close to the door. While he was performing the last-named operation, Sebastian stole to his side and whispered:

"I know there is danger at hand, Nicholas!"

"Bless you, no! There isn't an atom o' diffililty, and not that, neither, for it's a world o' diffililties, and there allers will be more nor less on 'em, specially more; and that isn't much arter all. I could tell ye tales o' diffililties, my pooty boy, that would last from now till to-morrer mornin' thout repeatin' nary one. Always bear one thing in mind," he added, more earnestly, "that whatever the diffililty is, there's one near ye that won't be afeard to meet it."

"I'm so certain of it! I'm so certain of it!" responded Sebastian, warmly. Then, hesitatingly, and depressing his voice: "But this man Pathaway. I hope you will—"

"Jes' so! jes' so!" returned Nick, thoughtfully. "I'll care for him as though he's my aatril son; though he's one the sort that don't need much takin' care on. You see him take care of hisself not long ago, in a way, too, that was stunnin' to look at. But let us go in; the man we're talkin' about has got his eyes on us now. He observes everything; he watches you; it has struck me summat sing'lar how he watches you."

"He feels contempt, perhaps, for my weakness," answered Sebastian, coloring, and questioning with his eyes.

"It would 'pear to be contempt, at times, but there is moments when it r'ally seems to be an uncomfortable, nervous dubiousness. You remind him, apperiently, of sunthin' he can't think of. There's trouble on the youngster's mind, weighin' down his sperrits, making him look like a clouded spring mornin'. He don't sleep well o' nights; he dreams and starts and mutters like a murderer; and not like a murderer, neither; but more like a young feller that's been disapp'inted in love. It's a terrible thing, my lad, to be disapp'inted in love!"

Nick stopped suddenly and fetched a sigh from the lowest depths of his chest—a half-regretful, half-sentimental sort of sigh; such as spring up from old remembrances, partly buried, partly above ground.

The youth was agitated. Nick had touched a responsive chord in his impromptu ramblings on the borders of the unfathomable world of the emotions. He turned his back to Nick to hide his perturbation. The trapper shook his head as if he had his thoughts, but would not speak them.

"Mountaineer," said Sebastian, presently, with affected cheerfulness, "were you ever 'disappointed in love'?"

Nicholas was walking toward the camp when this question was proposed, but it arrested him as suddenly as if a Mexican lasso had been thrown over his head.

"Disapp'inted, lad, disapp'inted? We're all more nor less disapp'inted. Yes!"—with a long inspiration—"yes, I might say I've been disapp'inted. There is times when a vision o' curls, bright eyes, a light figger, and a pooty mouth, comes over me with melancholy airnestness. But we won't speak on't now. When there's opportunity, I'll tell ye a story, prehaps; and prehaps I won't, neither; for what's the good o' mopin' and frettin' over what's past and gone? My way is to laugh at old diffililties, and brace up to meet the new."

Nick and Sebastian had scarcely entered the camp, when the dogs signified by their conduct that some one approached. Nick stepped out and met a man at the door, who came in at his invitation.

The personnel of this visitor was not engaging. He had a run-down, beggarish, not-doing-well look, which, while it did not greatly appeal to the sympathies of the parties, in no way added to his welcome. Several rusty traps were slung upon his back. His arms consisted of an old fowling piece, with a fractured stock tied up with strips of undressed skin, and a hunting-knife with a saw-edged and battered blade. His garments served to cover him, which was all that could be said of them; in fact, they hung around him in bemutched and unsightly tatters. His face, hands, and neck, were superfluously dirty; while his hair was in a state of studied disorder, as if stuck up and matted to meet the demands of some new backwoods fashion, which outstripping all others, had come on to the extreme of wildness. There was not that thinness and squalor of the face which ought fittingly to have accompanied the setting of this free-trapper gem. Despite his outside shabbiness, he had, clearly, been well fed.

Immediately upon his introduction, he took a leisure survey of the parties within; then laying aside his gun, and throwing down his traps, greeted the parties with:

"How are ye, critters?"

"Well's common, thank'e. Hope you left your folks well?" answered Nick, ungraciously.

"Ha'n't seen no folks lately, 'cept Ingins. Been starvin' and hidin' on the Saskatchewan peraries near the extreme tip o' the South Branch. Had an awful time with the Black-feet. Glad to see white critters ag'in. I'm

ruther run down in p'int o' clothes, but I don't s'pose it'll make no odds 'mong Christians."

It was visible from the manner of the gray hunter that he was not pleased with this newcomer. He observed that Sebastian watched him continually, and started at the first sound of his voice, as persons sometimes start at sight of a serpent. "How unfitted," he thought, "is this lad for the life he is leading! He has no nerve; his sensibilities 're shocked by the slightest circumstance; he is weaker than a love-tick girl. And yet—and yet," mused Pathaway, "his wild beauty fascinates me in spite of myself. If I feel a passing emotion of contempt, it yields to something strange and inexplicable that renders me melancholy and follows me in haunting dreams."

"What's your name?" inquired Nick, sharply.

"Hendricks, 'mong civilized critters," replied the person questioned, glancing at Portneuf.

"How happened ye to stumble on my camp?" continued Nicholas, in the same tone.

"Queer question to ask, brother, when you know that a hungry free trapper can smell a piece o' meat a dozen miles. Don't begrudge a feller bein' somethin' to eat and a fire to warm him by, do ye?"

Hendricks, turning his eyes slowly from Portneuf, met the fixed looks of Sebastian. A change came over him at once; his under jaw fell, his mouth remained open in a mingled expression of wonder, curiosity, and something else that might have been construed into fear. This passed quickly away, but Hendricks had seen or apprehended that which he could not forget. Had his swarthy features been freed from dirt and tan, they would have been found paler than Andrew Jeanjean's.

Nick, who was busy with the fire, heaping the brands together and feeding it with sticks, did not notice the sudden perturbation of his visitor; but with Pathaway, who was unoccupied, it did not pass without observation; yet it was a thing to which he had no clue to guide him to its meaning.

"I don't begrudge nobody nothin'," quoth Nick. "Them as comes to my camp hungry and tired shall be fed and rested, if I've got the means of doin' it. An honest, unlucky trapper never went away from my lodge dissatisfied."

"I'm sich a one as you describe, but I can't say my welcome has been o' the warmest," replied Hendricks, with less confidence than before.

"I dunno, I dunno!" responded Nicholas, doubtfully. "I ain't your jedge, and I'm glad on't, for I might jedge ye too hard. But you haven't got that open, straight forrard look that I like, I swear to gracious!"

Hendricks started up in a huff, scowling in an unfriendly manner at Nick.

"You want to fasten a quarrel on me, Nick Whiffles!" he said, biting his under lip.

"You know me then, it 'pears?" returned Nicholas, quietly.

"You ain't sich a stranger in the Nor'west that it need to surprise ye," answered Hendricks, measuring Nick from head to foot with his eyes. "It may be safe for ye," he resumed, "to insult me here with your friends 'round ye, but if we stood hand to hand on some lonely perarie or in a dark pass, your tongue wouldn't run on so free, I reckon. But," he went on, picking up his traps and fowling-piece, "I'll remember this agin ye, and if you git any good on't you'll be welcome to it."

"You'd better eat afore ye go, for I don't want anybody to go from my camp hungry. And," added Nicholas, looking quizzically at Hendricks's rotund face, "you must a been 'thout food a long time, jedgin' by your 'pearance. You've lost a heap o' flesh, that's plain, and I shouldn't wonder if you'd been fastin' more nor a week."

Nick's irony was not without its effect upon its object. At one moment he seemed ready to push matters to an unpleasant crisis, while at the next other emotions agitated him. When he looked at Nick, he was manifestly disposed to quarrel with him; but when his regards strayed to Sebastian, which they did furtively and often, his belligerent feelings were diverted to a different channel. Mastering whatever impulses rebelled against the movement, he threw down his traps, replaced his gun and said, doggedly:

"I see that my room is better nor my company, but I'll only stay long enough to swaller a cut from yonder piece o' meat; pervidin'

allers, you think you can spare it to an unfortunate devil who has lost his peltries and most of his traps in one way and another, atween Indians and dishonest white men."

"Jes' so! Here's a knife, here's a stick, there's a fire; you can cut, roast, and eat, to suit yourself."

"Wah!" grunted Hendricks, and without farther invitation commenced operations, cooking and eating in grim silence. Pathaway was well assured that the man was not at his ease: he did not eat as hungry men eat, swallowing his food mechanically and without relish. Having finished his meal, he slung his rusty traps upon his shoulders, and took his gun preparatory to taking leave.

"You're welcome to stay, stranger, if you can put up with our 'commodations,'" said Nick.

"Your welcome comes too late—just a lecture too late. You've pressed the cold shoulder agin me, Mr. Nick, and it'll be strange if our trails shouldn't cross each other somewhere afore we die." Hendrick's gaze rested as if by irresistible attraction upon Sebastian, who had shrunk into a corner and was half hidden from view by the person of Portneuf. The lad's weakness was yet upon him—that unaccountable excitement and pallor that sometimes rendered him an object of remark to Pathaway, whose ever-attentive eyes allowed nothing to escape unnoticed. The tableau of which he formed a part at that instant interested him much. The earnestness of Portneuf, the dull fixedness of Jeanjean, the poorly-concealed dislike of Nick, together with the singular deportment of the boy, and the varying expression of Hendricks, were things that struck him as peculiar, and significant of mystery and distrust.

The wayfaring, shabby trapper turned on his heel, darted a sinister look at Nick, and muttering, "When we meet again, perhaps I may be the entertainer and you the unlucky trapper. A good night to ye all. Wah!"

Hendricks departed hastily, as if glad to be gone, yet impelled by a strong motive to stay. Clear of the camp, he walked off with a strong and hasty step, that indicated neither fasting nor physical inability. But his presence had left an impression upon the parties, like that often induced by the notes of an evil bird upon minds that believe in signs and omens.

"A strange visitor," remarked Pathaway, wishing to break the oppressive silence. "And I thought, too, that you slightly deviated, friend Nicholas, from your wonted kindness and hospitality."

"There is them in the world, Pathaway, that we take a prejudice agin at first sight. Our two natures quarrel, as 'twere, the minute they come within techin' distance; they're like ile and water; they can't mix. In my case, that chap was one of 'em, and I'm glad he's left us. I've been tryin' and perplexin' and spurrin' my mem'ry to remember if I've seen him, and when and where."

Nick stroked his beard and gazed at the crackling embers at his feet. Sebastian stole to his side and whispered in his ear; he sprang to his feet as if a rattlesnake had stung him. An ominous frown gathered upon his before placid brow; his eyes flashed with sudden and deep indignation. He stood a moment with his teeth set hard together, struggling with amazement, incredulity, and anger—three foes to calmness that beset him at once.

He took his rifle from its place as if he would crush the iron barrel with his fingers; his muscular arm shook as he held it. The dog Calamity leaped to his feet and to his master with a low, savage howl, which he repeated at intervals. This metamorphosis in the person and prestige of Nick was so sudden that Pathaway was greatly surprised, as he had deemed the quaint trapper incapable of such a manifestation. He no longer doubted—if ever he had been dubious on that point—that humor and strength of character might be united.

"Mountaineer! mountaineer!" exclaimed Sebastian entreatingly and warningly, in a tone that had more firmness and energy in it than he had yet displayed before Pathaway. "Do not go! do not go, I say?"

"My pistols! my pistols!" said the trapper, hoarsely.

"Nicholas! hear me, Nicholas! If you have regard for me, Nicholas?" added the youth, his voice growing clearer and stronger.

"You binder me—you hinder me!" an-

swered the trapper, impatiently. "Every minute you are delayin' the vengeance of heaven. 'Let go of me, lad!'"

Nick shook off Sebastian's small hand somewhat roughly.

"It is not for myself that I am speaking! it is for you, for you that I am pleading," returned Sebastian.

"For me?" he responded, stretching out his disengaged arm. "For me? Is the life of Nick Whiffles, then, worth so much that it's too precious to be risked in the cause of justice! Is it of such vally that it shouldn't be hazarded when the best of my natur calls to me to go forth to wipe out an old account, and punish them as the Master o' Life has set aside as vessels o' wrath fitted up for destruction?"

Nick looked commanding and notably majestic in his honest and flaming indignation. He reached for his pistols and thrust them into his belt as if he were driving daggers into the object of his resentment.

"Don't follow him—don't follow!" persisted Sebastian, with increasing resolution and earnestness.

"Foller? I'll foller him to the ends o' the earth if I can place my foot on his trail!"

Nick turned to go.

Sebastian sprang between him and the door.

"You shall not!" cried the youth, authoritatively, while his eyes beamed with singular brightness. His clear accents thrilled Pathaway.

Nick gazed at the boy a moment, then stooping with the quickness of thought, lifted him bodily, set him gently aside, and sprang from the camp, Calamity darting after him, sharing evidently in his excitement.

Pathaway heard Nick say, "Come, Calamity!" and before he had recovered from his bewilderment, the trapper's steps had ceased to be heard.

CHAPTER XIV.

NICK'S REMORSE.

Sebastian, confounded for the instant, but quickly recovering, ran after Nicholas; but perceiving the folly of pursuit, stopped and leaned against a tree, like one dizzy, sick, and faint. Pathaway looked about for his weapon; while Jeanjean began to sing:

"Her eyes were like soft starlight gleaming
At midnight, on the sleeping water;
Her face was ever on me beaming;
I could but love the trapper's daughter.
Oh, the trapper's daughter!"

Pathaway remained irresolute and undecided, so much was he affected by the wild plaintiveness of Jeanjean's song, following as it did the scene that had just transpired.

"Ninon, ma jolie!" cried the Frenchman, covering his eyes.

Jeanjean's glassy orbs flickered up like the flame of an expiring fire. "Ninon, ma jolie!" he muttered, dreamily, and the fire in his eyes went out again.

Pathaway stepped to the door, and saw Nick returning softly, who, seeing Sebastian leaning against the tree, hastened to him like one stricken with sudden remorse. He touched the boy upon the arm, and said, tenderly:

"Forgive rough Nick, my child! Forgive rough Nick! He didn't mean to wound you; he wouldn't; he couldn't wound you; it isn't in his heart to do it. O Lord, no!"

The trapper waited for a response, but receiving none, and hearing his breathing grow shorter and shorter, added in alarm:

"You are angry; angry with a man that would die for ye; and you a'n't angry, neither; you're faintin'. Don't faint! don't!"

Sebastian smiled faintly, murmuring:

"I thought you had gone, Nick."

"I am, child, I am; and not gone, neither, but goin'. The fact is, I was summat rough with ye, and was afeard you might think on't unpleasantly, so to speak. But you know 'twas for your sake that my natur was so stirred. I was thinkin'—then, in a lower tone—"the man Pathaway is lookin'; he's allers lookin'." Then louder, that Pathaway might hear: "Cheer up, little 'un! I didn't mean to hurt ye, I'm sure. Which foot was it I stepped on? Corns are p'ison things to have, 'cause they're allers liable to be trod on. Have had one on my thumb toe goin' on now twenty year, that's powerful full of animosity at times. There! go in, and don't trouble yourself about Nick Whiffles."

Nick stopped and whispered:

"Are you angry? Can't you forgive my impoliteness?"

"I so feared for your safety! I have such

a horror of that man!" answered Sebastian.

"And you have reason," answered Nick, relapsing into his former fierceness. It is because you have reason that my anger burns so savage ag'in him."

"But to pursue him to-night," remonstrated Sebastian, "would be to expose yourself to needless danger. You may be certain that some of his comrades are not far distant. Why should you, then, in seeking that retribution which Heaven will certainly vouchsafe, peril your own existence? You must reach him by slow and wary movements; by tireless watching; by learning his habits and his haunts; and I am sure there are those who will assist you in an enterprise so laudable."

"Many, many!" said Pathaway, drawing near. "Providing you refer to those lawless men who infest this region of country. I, for one, have devoted myself to the work, and will permit no circumstance to divert me from it. The person who has just left us I know not, but I perceived that his presence—here he looked at Sebastian—"affected some of us unpleasantly. I agree with this singularly sensitive youth, that to follow him to-night would result in no good. Prudence is as necessary as courage."

"It is hard," returned Nick, slowly, "to master a feelin' that has been pent up in us a long time; but I a'n't so wise that I can't learn moderation, and take counsel from them that is my friends. I'll go to the top of yonder hill, howsomnever, and I may see which way the critter goes; for my old companion, the moon, is shinin' right beautiful."

With these words Nick and the dog—which had shown much impatience at this delay—set off toward the hill referred to by the former, leaving Pathaway and Sebastian together. Pathaway took the lad's hand.

"You manifest," he observed, "an extraordinary interest in yonder trapper. Were you his son, I might account for it, but as it is, it is quite inexplicable. You are as dissimilar in character as in person. Whence, then, springs this strange sympathy and friendship?"

"I have experienced his kindness in such a marked manner, that to have less affection for him would be black ingratitude. Besides," said Sebastian, "he once saved my life."

"Boy, your hand trembles in mine. Banish this effeminate weakness. Remember that courage is a necessary ingredient in human character; cowardice renders one pitiable."

The youth suddenly withdrew his hand, which was glowing as with fever.

"Contemptible, you might have said," he answered, with affected carelessness. "But I am not such a craven as you may think me. My body may be delicate and girlish, but my spirit is brave as that of boys of my age generally."

"What is your age?" asked Pathaway, now quite absorbed in contemplating and questioning the youth.

"Thirteen, perhaps; possibly fourteen," answered Sebastian, with hesitation.

"Older, older! And yet"—he spoke reflectively—"you are young enough."

"Yes, young and petted, and fit only for the society of boys," answered Sebastian, playfully.

"Boy!" exclaimed Pathaway, "your face is to me a perpetual mystery, and your character is equally bewildering. Nature made a mistake when she did not make you a woman."

"I have heard that Nature never makes mistakes," replied the lad, laughing.

"Though you laugh, you are still excited. You are panting and trembling, as if fear was with you an unconquerable propensity. Come, come, boy, be something besides a chicken; for I cannot love a coward, though there are moments when I feel strangely attracted to you."

"I only ask that you won't ridicule me," Sebastian replied, curtly.

"I should seek a different object for ridicule," returned Pathaway, somewhat piqued. "Ah! look yonder. There is Nick and that omnipresent bear. Observe that bruin stands erect upon his hind feet, and disputes, seemingly, the progress of Nick."

Sebastian looked, and beheld the object to which his attention had been directed. The bear was indeed standing strikingly straight, while the dog was walking suspiciously around it. The man and the beast confronted each other a short time, then the former turned to retrace his steps, while the latter walked lei-

sarely away.

As the trapper approached, Pathaway strolled meditatively in another direction, Sebastian watching him earnestly as he went. The gray hunter was in one of those half-melancholy, half-complaining moods that often visit persons of a certain temperament. He wished to be alone, for there are seasons in life when solitude is a luxury preferable to the allurements of human society. He felt his nature deeply stirred within him without knowing why. The youth gave him both pain and pleasure—excited both admiration and contempt; yet that contempt was so modified with compassion, so transient in duration, and so seldom experienced, that the word expressed infinitely too much. Sebastian was evidently a link connecting him with the past, in some way known to himself only. Possibly he possessed a face bearing similitude to one that had entered the charmed circle of his life at some period of his past history. The lad's skin bore the signature of two races; one, a persecuted and little-cared-for race. How, then, could such a youth revive memories of former days? Perhaps it was the extraordinary beauty of his face that pointed as an index to the past. The true key to his feelings, however, at present we are only left to conjecture.

Proceeding to a spot where he was concealed, apparently, from human observation, he sat down upon a luxuriant carpet of grass, and indulged in that train of reflection that circumstances had called up, the moon shedding her mild light around him, and a host of silvery stars looking down upon him through fields of immeasurable space.

CHAPTER XV.

BILL BRACE.

A figure working its way through the tangled grass; a form crouching behind bushes; a grim shape hiding behind rocks; a dark shadow creeping close to the earth; a head, now raised, now depressed; eyes shining with the cunning of the mousing cat and the eagerness of the hungry wolf; a strong and vindictive arm, and a hand clutching a knife.

Bill Brace, after his combat with the gray hunter, had been conveyed by his companions to a deserted Indian lodge in the neighborhood, to recover from his injuries; and to meditate too, as it proved, on the means of retaliation. It was not the nature of this hybrid to forgive the man who had the nerve and muscle to conquer him. He considered it an insult that could be balanced by the life of his vanquisher alone—nothing else would be an equivalent. Bruised in body and spirit, he tossed on his blanket in the lonely lodge, thinking more of vengeance than recovery—wishing for the latter only because it was necessary to the former. Supplied with food and other necessities by his comrades, he passed several days in comparative solitude; Ben Joice and Zenas Beck being absent most of the time—usually not returning till night, and not uniformly at that time. Gifted with a body of iron hardihood, and an unimpaired constitution, a few days sufficed to put him upon his feet again. Although not fully restored, and still suffering from his recent flagellation, he commenced searching for Pathaway; and discovered the new camp of Nick Whiffles on the afternoon of the day upon which the visit was made to Trapper Valley, and Portneuf rescued. Concealed in the bushes, he witnessed the return of the parties; and from that moment, his wrath burning with fresh fervor, he watched the little camp with tireless intensity, waiting an opportunity to execute his sinister design. The coming and departure of Hendricks, with the attending circumstances, produced a diversion in his favor. He saw, with a malignant joy known only to such as he, Pathaway leave Sebastian and Nick, and seek the solitary spot of which mention has been made.

It was Bill Brace that crouched in the grass—that hid behind rocks and bushes; it was his burly form that crept, shadow-like, close to the ground; his head that was now raised, now depressed; and his vengeful arm that held the glittering steel. How patient is vengeance in the pursuit of its object; and how shrinking, timid, and impatient is sometimes virtue when engaged in the best of causes. How happens it, I wonder, that the bad passions often burn more deeply, and possess more iron energy of determination, than the good?

The heart of Bill Brace beat fast with ex-

pectation. There was a wild, malevolent excitement in his breast, as he wormed, serpent-like, along the earth, and drew nearer to the victim of his resentment. He felt that savage delight that the Indian experiences when he tears the scalp from his fallen enemy. It was fortunate for Pathaway that the man had no weapon but his knife; for the distance was now so short between them, that even a pistol would have proved a fatal instrument in the practiced hand of Brace.

He crawled on—on hand, on knee, now bent like a worm, now prone on his face—seeing, knowing, realizing, and absorbed in but one thing, and that—murder! Every sense was strained up to that; every nerve and muscle was enlisted in that. Nearer—nearer—but a few yards from Pathaway's back! No noise had betrayed his coming: no rustle of leaves; no tell-tale crackling of twigs; no careless striking of feet against loose stones.

Bill Brace arose and walked upon his knees, with his weapon raised for the fatal blow! The gray hunter was still unconscious of danger: he sat leaning forward, his eyes fixed gloomily upon the ground; his thoughts and fancies might have been far away. Brace was within striking distance; he threw up his arm yet higher—it was about to fall!

The weapon was not fated to descend—at least in the manner intended. Sebastian Delaunay sprang between the two, and received the point of the weapon in his arm. The baffled assassin turned and fled.

Pathaway sprang to his feet—saw him bounding away, and the youth standing in the attitude in which he had received the wound: his right hand stretched out toward the spot where Brace had stood—the other held like a shield over Pathaway. Red drops trickled from the right arm and pattered upon the ground. Before the gray hunter had time to take in the scene, Nick Whiffles rushed to the place, pale and alarmed.

"I s'pected a p'ison diffikilty to-night, and it's come!" he exclaimed. "Hurt bad, ain't ye, little 'un? Arm hacked most off, I s'pose. What did you 'magine you could do with an arm no bigger nor a pipe-stem?"

"It would seem that he has done much with it," answered Pathaway, who now understood what had happened. "He has received the blow intended for me, without doubt. Brave youth! I hope you will forgive the injustice I have done you."

The outstretched arms sank slowly to Sebastian's side: he tottered, and was received, fainting, by Nick, who hurried with him to camp.

"Take off his coat," said Pathaway.

"Not for the world!" returned Nick, hastily. "He'd take a cold that he'd never git over long's he lives! I know his natur', which you don't—beggin' your pardon."

In quite a flutter, Nick cut open the sleeve of the boy's coat, and hurriedly commenced bandaging the wound. The gray hunter observed that the arm was small and delicate, and where not stained with blood, it was singularly white for a half-breed. A doubt, a vague, startling doubt—went floating through his brain like a cloud.

Sebastian opened his eyes with a shudder and complained of being cold. Nick finished the dressing of the wound as if it was something that could not be completed with too much dispatch—then fastened the severed sleeve at the wrist. Pathaway hung over him anxiously, ready to render him every aid in his power; but the trapper claimed the right of surgeon and nurse; so that he could do little else than express his thanks and sympathy.

"I'm afraid," said Pathaway, "that the bandage is too loose to check the bleeding. You put it on rather hastily."

"Not at all—not at all!" answered Nick. "You never see a boy stop bleedin' as quick as he does. He can stan' cuts and bruises beyond all account; and not bruises, either, but cuts. It's on'y eperdemies and other outrageous diseases that takes him down. Give him a fever, and 'twould go pesky hard with him, he's so small of his age; for a fever requires so much room to stir about in, that a good 'eal o' trouble might be anticipated. But this little diffikilty isn't nothin'."

The youth was lying with his eyes closed, but Pathaway perceived that he smiled faintly at the remarks of Nick.

"There's sich a healin' power in boys," added Nick, watching every change in Sebastian's countenance. "I r'ally believe if you'd a cut my fingers and toes off at night, when

I's ten years old, that they'd sprouted out ag'in by mornin'. All our family was jes' so. How do ye feel now, sonny?"

"Very well," said Sebastian.

"The little diffikilty don't pain ye any, does it?"

"No, Uncle Nicholas," answered Sebastian, cheerfully.

"What did I tell ye?" asked Nick, turning triumphantly to Pathaway.

"You are wonderful people, both," uttered the latter, with warmth. "But I should feel grieved indeed," he added, "should this brave and disinterested boy suffer serious injury on my account. I am heartily grateful, believe me."

Sebastian's color heightened, and he was about to speak, when Nick stopped him.

"Don't trouble yourself to answer, for I know how to do it better nor you. Boys never know what to say in sudden 'emergencies. The truth is, friend Pathaway, he's done nothin' more'n common, and he'll forget it afore his arm gits well. You don't know what a feller he is—he's allers savin' somebody's life; and not allers, neither, but whenever he has a chance. 'Tisn't worth mentionin'. Wonder what o'clock 'tis?"

Nicholas looked around, as if to know "what o'clock 'tis," was the absorbing topic of his thoughts.

"Used to run a watch, once, but 'twasn't one o' the little stunted consarns that folks carry now-a-days. 'Twould go like a trottin' horse when it got started. It got out o' order arter a while. Tried to fix it, but arter tinkerin' on it a couple o' days, I sold the in'ards to a Sioux chief, and closed out the rest o' the consarn to a squaw, who wore part on't for a brooch, and used the rest for a stew-pan. It's gettin' late; I'm sleepy, by mighty!"

Nicholas yawned, gave Sebastian some water, and, after covering him with his blanket, stretched himself composedly at his feet.

Portneuf and Jeanjean were already slumbering, the terrible ordeal to which the former had been exposed rendering sleep an overpowering necessity. The camp-fire flickered low, and the night went on; but restless, and unsollicitous of repose, Pathaway reclined, musing, at the door.

CHAPTER XVI.

CAPTAIN DICK.

On the following morning Pathaway left the camp, ostensibly to hunt for game, but really because his nature would not allow him to remain idle; he had a strong curiosity, too, to make himself acquainted with the prominent landmarks and peculiarities of the country. Possibly he had no special object in view, but followed those unquestioned impulses that so frequently impel men to action, and reach not only to the denizens of cities, but to the far fastnesses of the mountains.

Although of a reflective turn of mind, it was seldom that Pathaway was so abstracted and disposed to reverie as on that occasion. He walked scarcely seeing the ground he traversed; hill and valley, water and timber, seemed to pass him as objects float by us in dreams. Once a mountain sheep offered him a fair mark, but he did not look through the sights; an antelope bounded across his path within easy range, but the deadly rifle did not leap to his shoulder. Perchance the gray hunter was thinking of Sebastian and the wounded arm; but why the brown-faced youth should form a prominent picture on the canvas of his mind, is a question that gives rise to fresh queries.

Whatever was the tenor of his thoughts, he was recalled to the realities around him by the appearance of a man slowly descending the slope of a hill and coming directly toward him. He reminded him at once of the person he had seen in the cañon, wearing the red sash and exercising so much authority over those wild characters that acknowledged him their leader. Here was an unexpected event, and Pathaway was for a time perplexed respecting the regulation of his conduct. His first care was to see if he of the sash was unattended, or if there was any convenient lurking-place for his wild fellows. Having satisfied himself that his men, if in the neighborhood, were not very near, he resolved not to shun the meeting that now seemed inevitable; for the object of his attention had discovered him and not changed his course. There was a verdant level at the bottom of a hill, and both reached it at the same moment; they paused within pistol-shot of each other, wary and guarded,

but neither inclined to take the initiative in any act of hostility.

He of the red sash was dressed as we have previously described, armed with a double-barreled gun and a suspicious profusion of side-arms.

"Peace or war?" demanded Pathaway.

"Jest as it pleases ye, mister; a'n't particular. Don't be skeerd," returned the other, gruffly.

"Rest easy on that point; I'm not often frightened," answered Pathaway, with composure.

The parties—so opposite in character—walked toward each other as if by a common impulse. Pathaway had a vague idea that he recognized the voice, and scrutinized the man's face sharply; his features came one by one to his recollection, presenting to him the face of the shabby trapper, Hendricks, the visitor at Nick's camp on the previous night.

"You have repaired your ill luck very soon, I think, friend Hendricks!" he remarked, dryly.

"Oh, you haven't forgot me! Sharp eyes, eh? What do you think of me, critter?" returned Hendricks, staring inquisitively at the hunter.

The latter stepped back, and commenced a fresh survey of the questioner in a manner that could not but have been annoying to the subject of it.

"I fear my opinion, if avowed, would not be flattering. You have plenty of muscle and more assurance. You may have brute courage, but you are not handsome. In short, friend Hendricks, you do not impress me favorably."

"Um!" growled Hendricks. "What's your business hereabouts?"

"To hunt, to trap, in fact, to do as I please," answered Pathaway, meeting the axes of Hendricks' eyes steadily.

"Quite an independent character, it 'pears," replied Hendricks, grimly.

"Entirely so. Able to take care of myself, I fear neither ruffians, robbers, nor outlaw trappers."

Pathaway's manner was quiet, but there was meaning in the tones of his voice.

"Don't carry too high hand nor too high head, young fer, for you're with a critter now that knows how to tame such fiery and mettlesome colts. You're not old enough yet, to put on airs and play the veteran mountaineer. Boy, out o' pity for ye, I tell ye that you'd better go home. 'Tisn't every one I'd do so much for; but you're such a spirited crowder, and ruffle your feathers so quick, that you ruther 'muse me than t'otherwise. Jest take Nick Whiffles and leave the country, and you will git no harm from me."

The outlaw leaned on his gun, and chewed away at his quid violently.

"But if I choose to stay?" queried Pathaway, slowly, advancing a little closer to Hendricks, and bringing his eyes to bear upon him at point-blank range.

"Choose!" exclaimed Hendricks, his eyes flaring up like half-extinguished coals, "there's no choice about it. When I say 'Go!' folks go; they disappear and are seen here no more; when I say 'Stay!' they stay. The word of Captain Dick is law!"

The man drew himself up with something of pride and dignity. Conscious authority invested him for the moment with a certain wild impressiveness. He had controlled his fellows so long and so entirely, that resistance to his will was a species of audacity that he could not endure.

The gray hunter met his flaming looks without shrinking. As Captain Dick grew more imperious, he, if possible, grew more calm and stronger in his self-possession.

"Captain Dick," he replied, with a slight smile, "you will find no subject in me. I neither regard your authority nor fear your menaces. I have heard of you; report speaks badly of your character. Wicked deeds have been committed in the neighborhood of Trapper Valley."

"Have you got any brains?" asked Hendricks, turning sharply upon Pathaway, and attempting to quell him with the glances of his inflamed eyes. "Do you know the nature of the critter you're dealin' with? Perhaps you've got tired livin', and want to be put out the way; and ag'in, you may be disordered in the head."

He leered at the hunter like one whose emotions are divided between amazement and wrath; the latter, arising from the young

man's bold words, the other called into play by his singular self-control.

"As to the matter of brains," answered Pathaway, "I believe I have nothing to apprehend in regard to quantity; of the quality you shall yourself judge."

"Yes, I'll examine 'em by-and-by!" rejoined Hendricks, touching a large pistol with the tip of his finger, and contracting his forehead till his shaggy brows met. "I may safely say," he went on, with frightful humor, "that I'll look into 'em."

"I shall return all your favors. Be careful of your fingers, Captain; they have mechanically wandered to a weapon that is often dangerous."

"When a man meets a prowling beast in the forest," replied the outlaw, with a kind of savage self-restraint indicative of the smothered fire burning within, "he is wise enough not to wantonly provoke his anger; but you, mister, are anxious to thrust your neck under his paws. You dropped somethin' about robbers and outlaws. What did you mean?"

Hendricks advanced his face nearer to that of the young man, and flamed on him more fiercely with his glittering eyes.

Pathaway leaned forward as if willing to engage in the contest of glances.

"You ask my meaning, nor will I long keep you in suspense. I am glad of this opportunity of meeting you face to face. I have wished such a chance for many days. By the phrase I made use of, I referred to such as you."

"What am I?" asked Hendricks, hoarsely.

"An outlaw—an assassin, and the leader of assassins—a mountain-robber—a despoiler of trappers and hunters, and false alike to white and red men. It is a pleasure," he continued, in the same unruffled manner, "to meet you to-day, and thrust these unwelcome truths into your face—to tell you what a scoundrel you are, and how richly you deserve death at the hands of the hangman."

The mountaineer's tawny face bleached before the steady gaze of Pathaway. He was astounded! Such language from one that he considered little else than a boy, struck him as something so much out of the common course of events that he had no reserve force of philosophy to meet it. He remained in a sort of stagnation of consternation. But his color flashed back presently, and with it the full tide of his anger.

"Do you know what you have done?" he demanded, almost in a whisper. "Do you understand that you have committed suicide?"

"I know well what I do; I have measured myself and you; and I," he added, suddenly straightening his person, and speaking in a voice that was nearly as penetrating as steel, "am the better man!"

If one of the mountains before him had suddenly moved down to the prairies; if the lake at his left had dried up while he was looking at it; if the stream away at his right had turned and run backward, he could not have evinced such blank incredulity. He tried to get vent in a mocking laugh that was like the report of a pistol.

"I must take breath; this chokes me up like a sudden cold. Wait; don't be in hurry. I'll kill you presently at my leisure. I need fannin', critter!"

"More than that; you need punishment."

"Bring the man! bring the man!" cried Hendricks.

"He is here."

"Where?"—contemptuously.

"Look at me, and you will see him!" retorted Pathaway, with a piercing glance.

"You—*you!*" muttered Hendricks, mockingly.

"Try me!" was the quiet response.

"I?"

"You?"

The two men stared silently at each other. The contest had already begun—in the mind; it had not reached the muscles. Thus far in the fight the gray hunter had sustained himself, and he was every moment growing firmer. His prestige was having its effect on Hendricks.

"When—where—how?" asked the latter, eagerly.

"When—where—how you please," answered Pathaway, his nostrils dilating, his lips curling.

"The weapons—the weapons?" interrogated the outlaw, quickly, with latent remains of doubt upon his face.

"You may choose from the whole variety the world affords—swivels, blunderbusses, mas-

kets, rifles, carbines, pistols, swords, bowie-knives, or, if you will, the hard muscle."

The gray hunter spoke slowly, distinctly, and as composedly as if discussing the ordinary matters of life.

"Um!"

A drop or two of the ludicrous diluted the ruffian's wrath. Was ever such a piece of temerity heard of! Ought he to be amused, or should he allow his resentment to rise till it ran over? It was the strangest thing! It was terribly presumptuous, too. But he would take his time; he would show this silly, audacious boy what it was to provoke the sovereign of the mountains. He wouldn't hurry; he would hold his indignation down a space, and give the insulter opportunity to realize what he had done.

"I don't know," he said, doubling his brawny fist and thrusting it within an inch of Pathaway's nose, "what on airth keeps me from sp'ilin' the shape of your head with this 'ere awful striker; but I s'pose it's the same thing that keeps the cat from eatin' the mouse till it's played with it and tossed it about with its paws."

"You haven't named the weapons, brag-gart."

Hendricks made a provoking grimace; and, suddenly thrusting his arm farther forward, caught the young man's nose between his thumb and finger. Pathaway's fist darted out in a straight line from his shoulder, and Hendricks fell upon his back with a violence that made his joints crack. He lay stunned an instant, then arose, bewildered, holding his hands to his head, standing unsteadily. It appeared to the outlaw that he had never seen so many electric sparks in his life as now danced about before him. He was like the ox once felled by the axe in the stambles, which, springing blindly to his feet, in a flurry of pain, sways wildly to and fro with depressed frontlet and starting eyes.

Hendricks sat down upon the ground, and waited quietly for the mist to clear away. His face was very pale when he took his hands away and looked up at Pathaway. The stormy part of his wrath had given place to a deeper, more deadly feeling. His moderation was perfectly understood by the hunter, who, well acquainted with the play of human passions, knew what that calmness boded.

"This, of course," he said, huskily, "must be answered for. There follers a squarin' up atween us. I might refuse to fight ye, and yet have ye in my power; but my vengeance wouldn't be complete. I must punish you myself with my own hand. I've been summat mistaken in ye, I'll grant, which makes it worse for you. You took me onawares, and struck right hard; but the bowie-knife will strike deeper, and to that weapon I hold ye."

"Let it be so; I accept. I will vanquish you with that as I have with *this*," Pathaway held up his clenched hand.

Hendricks drew forth a large bowie, and after feeling its edge, placed it on the ground beside him. The action, in the usual tenor of life's events, would have been simple and passed unnoticed; but in this instance there was that in it to make one shrink: so much do the motives of man color his acts. Everything has a meaning; and it is the meaning of everything that we look after.

"Don't hurry, Captain," continued Pathaway. "There's time enough. If one of us dies between now and to-morrow morning, will not that be sufficiently soon? Candidly, do you think either of us shall want less time than that for preparation? As for you, there are some bad jobs on your hands that'll have to be accounted for. Blood, you know, is never silent; it will always cry out for vengeance; and try as you will, you cannot bury and smother it. Perhaps the Infinite Judge will ask you: 'Where is Portneuf, the *voyageur*? Where is Andrew Jeanjean, the trapper?' What answer will you make, Captain Dick?"

"I see that you know too much—too much!" returned Hendricks, rising. "A voice like yours must be stopped; the worms must have cold tongue to feed on."

Captain Dick threw his pistols upon the ground, unbuckled his belt, and cast it from him.

"Stop a moment! We cannot meet now on equal terms. I know the effect of such a blow as I have given you. Your limbs are weak; your arms have lost half their strength; your eyes are unsteady. Should we engage as you are, I should kill you at the first pass."

Meet me to-morrow night, just as the sun is setting, and your sun and it may set at the same time—the first, in glory and brightness; the last, in perdition and darkness.”

The clear, deep tones of Pathaway had a touch of solemnity, they were like the voice of an accuser confident in the triumph of truth and justice.

“It’s but an artifice!” muttered the Captain.

“To-morrow night, as the sun is setting, I will meet you on this level, with a single weapon, and that shall be this.” The hunter touched the bowie-knife at his belt.

The outlaw stood scowling a few moments, then said:

“Let it be to-night—to-night!”

“To-night be it. Do not doubt me; without fail I will be here. God help him that falls! and that will be you!”

“I doubt whether to trust you,” said Hendricks, fingering his shaggy beard, while his lawless spirit chafed within him like a caged beast to which captivity is irksome.

“Will you come alone?” he asked, suspiciously.

“Alone,” replied Pathaway. “And you?”

“Shall need no witness,” added Hendricks, fiercely, as if completing the hunter’s last sentence.

“You are not over-scrupulous, Captain Dick, and taking your word is more dangerous than meeting you. Keep away your fellows; I shall be watching—I shall be well assured on that point. Some men can be trusted; you are not of that kind. Do I strike well, Captain?”

The grey hunter smiled derisively, while Hendricks’ brow was knit into a score of wrinkles.

“Twas a foul blow, and shall prove the dearest you ever struck! Enjoy your triumph, critter, and don’t think to sneak away ’thout hearin’ ag’in from Cap’n Dick. If you hope to give me the slip, you’ll be disappointed; for every pass and defile will see you, if you start. Well, ’twon’t matter much,” he added, with a sardonic laugh, “for a rifle ball will do your business just as well, and save me trouble. At sunset, youngster, at sunset!”

“My memory is good,” returned Pathaway. “Adieu, valorous Captain, till then.”

The trapper-outlaw walked a short distance, then looking over his shoulder, muttered:

“There’ll be one cock the less to crow in the mornin’!”

A laugh expressive of his malignancy and humiliation accompanied this remark—a startling, unnatural sound rattling up from the chest, like the threatening growl of an animal.

Pathaway made no answer, but turned his face toward Nick Whiffles’ camp.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DUEL.

The departing sunlight lay in horizontal beams upon the earth, quivering like long tongues of fire upon the grass. The descending orb never looked more like a deity worthy the worship of man. It sank with golden majesty below the western verge.

Pathaway stood on the grassy level where he had met Hendricks. Twilight fell like a far-stretching, vapory cloud, wrapping every object in a shadowy mantle. That impressive silence that sometimes follows the dying day, rested upon the spot. The leaves hung motionless upon the trees, and the long spires of grass stood still and stirless. The quietude spoke to the heart of the young man as with a voice. His finer sympathies held communion with Nature, and recognized her noiseless footsteps around him.

He stood with folded arms looking toward the slope where he was in momentary expectancy of seeing Hendricks; and that personage presently appeared. He soon reached the level.

“I have waited you,” said Pathaway, as the trapper-outlaw drew near. “I feared you had thought it best to forget this appointment.”

“I have come to fight, not to talk!” retorted Hendricks, gruffly.

“You shall be satisfied, Captain Dick.”

The parties laid aside their belts and pistols. Hendricks threw off his hunting shirt, displaying an arm bare and brawny.

“The terms of this duel—” began the gray hunter.

“Are to the victor life, to the vanquished death!” interposed Hendricks.

“I expected as much, and came fully prepared for such terms.” The hunter took off

his gray frock, but without bluster or any attempt at effect; his chest was full and rounded, his arms shapely, yet without uncommon development of muscle. His antagonist observed him with dogged curiosity and impatient and insolent eagerness, as if already assured of victory, and unwilling to delay it.

Pathaway was pale, and a change had gradually taken place in his expression; his eyes were blazing with a light that Hendricks had not before seen in them. He grasped his weapon, and the two regarded each other warily; then Hendricks sprang forward, and their blades met. A sharp and angry clamor rang through the air, disturbing the soft repose of the spot. It soon became apparent that Captain Dick was resolved to make the contest a short one, and end it by a bold and vigorous onset. He wielded the terrible instrument he had chosen with great skill and rapidity; it waved on every side like lightning, and on every side met opposing steel. His fierce lunges at the hunter’s breast were turned away as with a shield of iron.

Pathaway acted on the defensive only, now retreating, now leaping nimbly to the right or left, now warding a blow from his face, now from his neck, chest, side, and limbs, performing all these feats with an ease and adroitness that proved him equal to the emergency.

Captain Dick perceived that he was spending his strength in vain, and suspended his furious assaults to take breath. Pathaway silently awaited the renewal of the combat; but it was not difficult to see that he was becoming interested in the terrible game. The outlaw’s first confidence was gone; and to lose that in such a trial, is to lose much. Victory is half won, when one does not doubt himself. Doubt is the enemy of success.

Hendricks advanced to continue the contest with much more cautiousness and much less assurance. Pathaway now began to press him, and to exhibit a skill and quickness that cowed the impetuosity of his antagonist, and made his ruffian heart beat fast with apprehension.

“I have you, captain!” said Pathaway, with startling emphasis. “You are mine—I am your master!”

Hendricks’ weapon flew from his hand into the air, falling on the grass at some distance; he stood before the hunter, unarmed, and panting like an overworked ox. Pathaway stood with his knife pointed at his breast, stern, firm, and threatening as a minister of vengeance. The color faded from Hendricks’ face, and he seemed to feel already the touch of death. As they confronted each other, the one with a proud glow of triumph, the other with wild consternation, the voice of a woman arrested the hand of Pathaway, and almost instantly a female form was interposed between him and Hendricks.

“Hold!” she cried. “Would you kill an unarmed man? It is *me* that you strike when you strike him.”

Pathaway looked at the face that was turned rebukingly upon him, and recognized the young woman that Portneuf had called Carlota. He drew back, and answered, gracefully:

“For your sake I spare him, though his life, by the terms of our meeting, is forfeit to me.”

“And what good would his life do you?” asked Carlota.

“Ask Portneuf, or Andrew Jeanjean that I question,” answered the hunter, sternly.

“Your meaning is dark,” said Carlota, changing color.

“So was the trapper’s grave in the lonely canon!” retorted Pathaway, with a searching look.

Carlota put her hand to her brow dubiously, gazing fixedly at the hunter, whose countenance appeared to fascinate her.

“Hush! hush! no more. You are trifling with that—with that which you ought to value,” responded Carlota, quickly, and with earnestness. A warning glance accompanied this remark.

“Believe me, young woman, I shall put no restraint upon my tongue while truth compels me to speak, and my arm is able to make good my words. I said that this ruffian’s life was forfeit to me; it is, and not to me alone, but to the law; for law reaches to every country, however remote from the great centres of civilization. The presence of human beings makes law even in the wilderness.”

“Foolhardy young man!” answered Carlota. “I would have given your own life for his, and you must attribute what may happen to your imprudence.”

Carlota waved her hand, and immediately a

score of men arose from the grass and bushes.

Pathaway was instantly surrounded by a set of fellows who would have graced the deck of a pirate-ship. The outlaw-trapper laughed triumphantly, for the vision of sudden death had passed. Men grow brave after danger and lawless passion is insolent. We oscillate like pendulums from one idea to another. The cheek that is now pale with terror will soon be flushed with pride. Sudden deliverance often produces a revulsion that reaches to the very extreme of opposite emotion.

Hendricks was now disposed to abuse his power, forgetful of the clemency of his conqueror. Pathaway, however much disturbed inwardly, maintained his composure, quietly put on his coat, and while doing so, dexterously managed to conceal his knife about his person.

“Well, miss or madam,” he said, with some bitterness, “I seem to be your prisoner. At your request, I spared the life of this burly ruffian. What reward shall I receive for my gallantry?”

Pathaway, as he stood erect in his manly beauty, was an object of no ordinary interest to the girl Carlota; and he, in turn, did not look upon her without curiosity mingled with pity. What was her history? What wayward fate had given her such a life? What imperative circumstances had shaped her course, making her the friend, companion, accomplice, and leader of outlaws? He thought, as every man does when he sees a misdirected woman, what she might have been under different auspices.

“A little spot of earth somewhere near Trapper Trace!” she replied, in a low voice, studying his features.

“It’s what we shall all want,” muttered Pathaway.

“Critter, it’s what some won’t want long!” said Hendricks, with vindictiveness.

“I don’t know—I don’t know, Captain Dick,” responded the hunter, looking significantly around him. “I have seen those whose bodies will at last rest in air.”

“You count on our bein’ hanged; but sich a thing won’t be in your day. If any on us ever come to the halter, it’ll be arter you are past seein’ the sight.” Then to his men: “Critters, form! Set your faces toward Trapper Trace, and keep a sharp look-out for this pork-eater. By-the-way, lads, that confounded Frenchman got clear in some way; found him last night, or his ghost, at Nick Whiffles’ camp. ’Twon’t do to make another sich bunglin’ job as that. Go ahead, boys, go ahead! Carlota, you come in the nick o’ time. You see I was taken dizzy of a sudden, and this critter took advantage on’t.”

A smile flitted over Pathaway’s lips. Some of the men shrugged their shoulders and leered at each other.

The parties were soon in motion. Ascending the hill, surrounded by his captors, the gray hunter, to his surprise, saw horses enough to mount them all in the valley on the other side. The outlaw trappers had left them there, in order that their farther advance might be less conspicuous. In a short time, they were all in the saddle. Pathaway found himself riding beside Carlota. He had never been placed in a position so peculiar, and one so well calculated to awaken serious reflection. The night had fully set in; but it was not so dark but he could see very well the person of his companion. She was dressed as he had seen her on the previous day. Of her face and figure he was able to form a more accurate judgment. That she was physically gifted by nature, he was not long in perceiving. Her swelling bust and rounded arms were fine specimens of developed womanhood; while her figure generally, indicated litheness and activity. Her light-brown hair was kept in place by a velvet band, but was allowed to flow in curls upon her neck and shoulders. Her features were regular, but strongly marked, and possessed of a wild and daring beauty. Her eyes were darker than her hair, exceedingly quick and penetrating. She sat her horse as if she had been accustomed to the saddle from childhood. She controlled her beast with a firm, strong hand, and rode as fearlessly as any of her lawless followers. Pathaway noticed her particularly; for he was desirous to know if he could base hopes of escape upon her womanly instincts.

“This is a strange life for one of your sex,” said the gray hunter, watching her countenance, to see if it gave any indication of the qualities which would operate in his favor.

“And yours, perhaps, appears strange to me.”

What other life can be so free?" she answered, with a sharp pull at her bridle-rein.

"Free indeed! too free—too free!" returned Pathaway.

"From your point of view, yes; but people have to be just what their surroundings make them."

She glanced at the hunter inquiringly, who, leaning toward her, replied:

"The surroundings must be bad that force one of your sex to become what you appear to be."

"What kind of a creature do you consider me?" she asked, petulantly.

"A misdirected woman—the accomplice of crime and robbery."

"You are plain-spoken, sir!" retorted Carlota, tartly.

"Do not mince matters; it is too late to be dainty in regard to the character of the solitary and predatory horde of which you are a member. Look at these fellows around you; they are lawless and intractable as Indians; faithless as the wandering Arabs of the desert."

"I care not to talk of this subject. There are other matters that might employ your thoughts more profitably."

"I understand you. You would say that I should be thinking of dying, and what comes after death. Believe me, my life has not been so bad that I need to trouble with late remorse. And after all," he added, "it is not manly to whine and lament at the approach of man's last enemy. I speak sincerely, for I doubt not that my end is near; and with you, woman, will lie the crime of my murder."

"You talk coolly of a subject that generally pales the cheek of the stoutest," responded Carlota.

"My own will be pale, questionless, when that hour arrives; but I trust it will not be with coward fear, but that wholesome awe which will fall upon one as he enters the portals of that other world of which this is the threshold."

"We who dwell in the mountains know of but one world. There—there! let us not speak together farther. I wish not to have other than accustomed thoughts. I would think of my horse, of the mountains and prairies, of a wild and irresponsible life of freedom."

Carlota pointed toward her companions, and added:

"We are a community by ourselves—a world by ourselves; we make our own laws, and acknowledge fealty to no outside legislation. I know that the world is very large, and there are many dwellers in it; but they are strangers to me, and I to them."

"But that is no good reason why you should become beasts of prey," said Pathaway, with earnestness.

"It is a law of Nature," Carlota continued, emphatically, "that one animal should live at the expense of another. The fish in the water, the beasts in the forest, the birds in the air, devour each other. The spider weaves its web to catch the unsuspecting fly; the panther crouches in his covert to spring upon the deer; the hawk swoops down upon the chicken; and following the great law of Nature, man preys upon man. Why should we scorn the teachings of Nature? How shall we resist the momentum which she has given to all animate things. Even vegetable life flourishes best upon the decay of last year's growth."

Carlota's face flushed, and a wild enthusiasm beamed from every feature. Pathaway gazed at her in mute astonishment.

"Is it possible? is it possible!" he murmured. "Can a mind so gifted be so perverted? Whence this knowledge—this flowing speech—this aptness of simile—this command of language? Woman," he went on, addressing her in a regretful tone "you make me inexpressibly sad. I see what you are, but I think what you might have been! What you might have been, but are not. Alas! how wayward is human nature. In contemplating you I forget myself, and exclaim mentally: 'Her fate is worse than mine, though a violent death looks me in the face.'"

Carlota mused, playing with her riding-whip nervously:

"It has never been my fortune to meet one like you before. To what genus do you belong?" She asked, presently, in a voice divided between curiosity and badinage.

"I am but a humble member of the great family of man, and not a beast of prey, like those around me. I am an animal, but a human and humane one, I trust."

"And I," rejoined Carlota, bitterly, "am the

animal in a wild and uncultivated state!"

"And I, it would appear, your lawful prey. When," he added, sarcastically, "shall you make a meal of me?"

Carlota reddened, then smiled, and deigned to glance at the person of Pathaway.

"I wash my hands of this matter," she answered, by-and-by, with evident hesitation and chagrin. "You will be dealt with according to the laws of our community, and by those of your own sex. Don't hope anything from me."

"One cannot help expecting kindness from woman," rejoined Pathaway, quickly. "Pity should ever dwell in her bosom. I must, I will trust in you!"

The gray hunter turned his handsome face to Carlota with a manly glow upon it.

"It is, it will be in vain! I command—yes, I command you to dismiss such thoughts," she replied, with more authoritative fervor than she had yet displayed.

"You forget, fair outlaw, you command these ruffians, not me."

"Outlaw and ruffians!" muttered Carlota, annoyed and vexed.

"Yes," resumed Pathaway, bending toward her, and speaking softly, "you will save me! You will lead me unscathed from the midst of your lions."

"No! I tell you no!" she answered, hurriedly, with marked emphasis, and touching her horse with the whip, galloped to the side of Hendricks, leaving Pathaway in a whirl of doubt and agitation.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TRAPPER TRACE.

The way became more difficult, and the night darker; but after winding about among mountains, crossing ravines, strips of bottom-land and timber, they entered a narrow bridle-path—so narrow, indeed, that they were obliged to ride in single file. Pathaway's mind teemed with plans of escape; but no feasible opportunity seemed likely to occur. Once or twice he thought seriously, when in a more open country, to spur his horse and dash off at full speed, trusting to luck and the darkness to aid his flight. But so closely was he guarded, that no practicable chance presented; and after entering the bridle-path just mentioned, that experiment could not be tried with any hope of success—for rocks and beetling cliffs towered on either hand.

Carlota, through accident or design, was now riding directly before him, and the party traveled at a slow pace. Pathaway wished to renew his conversation with the young woman, still anxious to make an impression that should be favorable to him.

"This is a wild tract of country," he remarked, availing himself of a moment when Carlota's face was casually turned toward him. "What part of your territory may we now be in?"

"The trail we are traveling is called Trapper Trace. It took its name from the legend of a white trapper, who was the first to explore this solitary region. This trapper became involved in the intricacies of the mountains; and it was not until after wandering about some two months, in the midst of winter, and suffering incredible hardship, that he was able to make his way out again, famished and frost-bitten."

"Had this thing occurred recently, his disappearance could be more easily accounted for," returned Pathaway.

"Without doubt," replied Carlota, with a toss of the head.

"Trapper Trace, I suspect, leads to Lost Trapper Valley. I've heard that more than one trapper has lost his way in these solitudes."

"Quite possible!" said Carlota.

"Nor is it very surprising," resumed the gray hunter, "that one should not be able to find this thread-like path after entering the Valley, with its hundred indentations and apparent outlets. 'I think,' he added, ironically, "that there should be huts of refuge erected in this bewildering region, and a kennel of St. Bernard dogs kept in training for the rescue of lost and forlorn trappers and hunters."

While thus conversing, the Trace gradually widened; and Pathaway pressed forward to Carlota's side.

"Trapper Valley," said the latter, pointing to a village of smoky huts that suddenly appeared before them as the bridle-path opened upon the valley in question.

Pathaway gazed at this unexpected scene with unfeigned surprise.

"I supposed," he said to his conductress, "that the lair of the mountain outlaws was farther up, in some rough-hewn cavern among the rocks."

"Those who go farther seldom return," answered Carlota, in a low voice. "Dismount!"

The gray hunter obeyed with alacrity, and offered his hand to Carlota; but refusing the proffered gallantry, she sprang lightly to the ground without such aid. Looking around, he beheld frowns on the faces of half-a-dozen surly fellows, and Hendricks himself scowled, as if little pleased with the familiarity of his prisoner.

"Shall I not hear from—shall I not see you again?" Pathaway asked, in a whisper.

Carlota made no answer; but holding up her habit daintily, disappeared in one of the huts. He gazed after her earnestly, as if his last hope had vanished with her.

"Go along, critter!" growled Hendricks pushing him in the direction of a hut that seemed stronger than the others. "There's no help fur ye now. If you'd minded your own consarns and let us alone, there'd been no trouble; but you've seen fit to act as spy and look arter matters with which you'd no right to meddle nor make. You and Nick Whiffles have been sneakin' about this long time; and in my 'pinion, had somethin' to do with the escape of the Frenchman. Perhaps you thought I didn't know him when I see him last night at Nick's hut?"

"I knew that something terrified you," answered Pathaway.

"'Tis false! I was never afeard!" retorted Hendricks, angrily.

"I saw you staring at the empty air as if you saw a ghost," said Pathaway, resolved to try an experiment.

"That's a lie, too; for I's lookin' at the boy!"

"Boy!" repeated the hunter, with affected surprise.

"Yes, the handsome boy," added Captain Dick, with an inquiring look.

Pathaway shook his head dubiously.

"You must have seen what the rest of us did not," he said, with a perplexed air.

"Bah! do you think I'm blind? I saw him as plainly as I see you. Don't fool with me, mister; for I ha'n't much patience, and don't bear contradiction very well when I can have things my own way."

"I'm afraid you have a bad conscience, Captain Hendricks," said Pathaway, reflectively. "Bad consciences create a thousand fantastic shapes in the minds of wicked men. However, I am not your judge; and I dare say but too many things are real that appear to me illusory. You know best whom you have injured, and what shapes have a right to haunt you."

Hendricks tried to laugh contemptuously; but there was more of fear than contempt in the hollow sounds that came from his throat. To save his character for courage, however, he let off a volley of oaths; in spite of which his face was pale and his terror obvious.

"Go in, critter," he added, pointing to the hut, "and don't play off on me. As for wrongin' a boy of his age, I never did. Do you think we're land-pirates, that we must kill every child we see?"

"I can't comprehend you, Captain Hendricks," answered the hunter, impressively.

"The devil you can't," cried the captain, furiously.

"I have heard," resumed Pathaway, with a shiver, "that murdered people can't rest. I don't make the remark as having any allusion to you, Captain; but doubtless you have heard the same. It does, in truth, seem just that the ghosts of the murdered should dog their murderers day and night, and give them no peace. Some have been thus driven to confess crime, and cast themselves into the teeth of that terrible monster, Law—that grim dragon that devours without remorse."

"No more sich trumpery stuff!" exclaimed Hendricks. "No sensible person believes in ghosts. When a man dies, that's the last of him; and I'm glad on't. What kind of a life do you s'pose a critter'd lead arter he'd rubbed out a man or two in skriminages or t'otherwise, if their ghosts could come back ag'in, lookin' as pale as death, with eyes fixed and glassy."

"I'm afraid it's too true!" said Pathaway, in a low voice. "I had the misfortune to kill a man in a duel, and his face," he added, solemnly, "won't leave me; it follows, follows, follows!"

"Jack Wiley! Jack Wiley!" cried Hendricks. "Here, Jack; take care of this feller till mornin'. If you let him git away, I'll string you up higher'n Haman!"

By this time Pathaway was in the hut, and the person called arose from the floor, where he had been sleeping.

"Tend to business now, Jack, and rub your eyes arterwards," added the captain. "Here's a spyin' critter that's goin' to step out afore the sun sets ag'in, and I want you to keep a sharp eye on him till he's wanted."

"Jest as you say, Cap'n," grunted Jack. "Has he got any weepens about him?" he asked, stirring the fire that was burning in the centre of the hut.

"You can see for yourself that he's got nothin' but his hands," replied Hendricks. "But if you're afraid you can't keep him with your pistols and your gun, call up one or two of the boys to help."

"Why don't you do for him to-night, and that'll save the trouble of watchin'?" It's very simple—a half-ounce o' lead, you know."

"Do as I tell ye!" answered Hendricks sharply, and without stopping to parley longer with his subordinate, walked away.

The fire flared up brightly. Wiley looked at the face of his prisoner. "It's you, is it?" he said. "Seed you with that tall hunter and the boy. Your name's Pathaway, Runaway, or some sich name. Well, you've got into a nice fix, now. Don't expect to live long, do ye?"

"I don't despair entirely."

"You'd better. The best advice I can give ye, is to make up your mind to sleep soundly in this 'ere valley."

"No; I cannot resign myself to that! I am young yet, and there ought to be many good years of life before me."

The gray hunter glanced at Wiley, to see if there was compassion in his face; but it was as sombre as the walls of the hut.

"You look like an honest man, Mr. Wiley?"

"But I ain't; I'm a scoundrel! I don't thank no man to call me honest. Set down, and don't be starin' about as if you's lookin' for a hole to dodge out on. These playthings"—he looked at his pistols—"has got lead in 'em, and powder ahind it."

The gray hunter seated himself by the fire, Jack Wiley having already taken a position near the door, with his pistols and rifle beside him.

"When we met before, it was in a friendly manner, and in company with one who had done you an important service. Let us be reasonable. Fortune has thrown me into your power; let us talk over the matter calmly, and it may appear that you cannot do a better thing than to befriend me. There is no person so assured in good luck but the time may come when he may need friends. Tell me how much it is worth to you to stay here and be an outlaw, with a vision of the gallows continually before you, and I will make it twice that sum beyond the mountains, where, instead of a haunting shadow of a felon's death, you shall have peace and security. Contrast that with your present condition."

"Does freedom go for nothin', eh?"

"Does your neck go for nothing?" returned Pathaway. "Can you sleep without dreaming of halters? Is it not better to feel like an honest man than like a rogue? Were I in your place, Jack Wiley, I should strangle in my dreams."

"But you won't! you'll strangle wide awake! Uh!"

Wiley yawned, and looked sleepily at the hunter.

"It's all very pooty," he added; "but you can't go! Why can't ye? 'Cause you can't!"

"You don't talk like a man of sense. You speak like one whose brain is muddled with liquor. What greater freedom do you want, than the freedom of the whole civilized world, with money in your purse and a good coat to your back?"

"You don't understand me at all, Mr. Pathaway, nor how a mountaineer likes the life he's allers been used to. What could a rough feller like me do down in the settlements? What would Jack Wiley be good for, there? Who'd think anything of him, eh? Could he wear rat-skin gloves, and stiff hats, and shiny boots? Could he go into drawin'-rooms any more nor a grizzly bear? Would anybody take off their hat to him? No; they'd laugh, and say: 'There comes a wild varmint from the mountains! That'd be mighty fine, wouldn't it? I could stan' that, couldn't I? Wah! wah!'"

"Not so bad as that," replied Pathaway,

considerably staggered by this argument. "One soon learns the ways of civilized life."

"No civilization for me! Give me the Nor'-west and the red Ingin beauties, and I'm satisfied. None o' your pale, sickly lookin' white squaws for Jack Wiley; there's no sweetness in sich; it's bleached out of 'em by the clearin's. The brown beauties forever! So don't talk no more. You're in for it and can't help it; so make up your mind, and hang like a reasonable bein'. What's the use botherin' me? Want to get me into a scrape, I s'pose? The captain is a devil of a feller when he's disappointed, and the distance is long that'd prevent his findin' me if I should play him a trick. When you go a swimmin' in cold water, you musn't stan' shiverin' on the bank, but plunge right in, and it's all over in an instant. It's jes' so with hangin'."

"I hoped," said Pathaway, regretfully, "that you had a heart to be touched by the misfortunes of a fellow-creature, but perceive that I was mistaken. I was about to offer you a thousand dollars for freedom."

"A thousand dollars!" repeated Jack, slowly. "That's a right smart pile, mister. There's a good many drunken frolics in a thousand dollars—a tearin' visit to Selkirk or Montreal."

"A thousand, in gold!" added the hunter.

"Do you happen to have it about ye?" asked Wiley, with a quick look.

"Thank Heaven, no! I'm not so silly a fish. If I had so much money on my person, I should be wise enough to keep it to myself. I would not offer a reward for my own murder, by proclaiming such a fact. There—you look more comfortable now; you startled me a moment ago by the eagerness of your eyes. I have not sufficient money in my pocket to buy a pint of your beloved beverage, whisky; but I know where to find it, Jack."

"Don't bother! lay down and go to sleep, so that your naves may be strong in the mornin'. I'm not the kind o' bird that's ketched with salt or chaff."

"Well, have your own way," said Pathaway, sternly. "That bullet head of yours will run your head into a noose, yet. I may not be present to see it, but feel assured that it will be so. I will no longer attempt to appeal to your cupidity or to touch your humanity. You have proved yourself a heartless wretch in the hour of my need, but it's not impossible that the next revolution in the wheel of fortune may change our relative positions."

"Sartin it 'll change 'em!" interrupted Jack, with brutal indifference. "You'll be up and I'll be down; but your toes won't tetch the ground, and mine will."

To this allusion Pathaway made no reply, but disposing his person as comfortably as he could, began to think those thoughts that those think who feel they are approaching the crowning and last pain of human life, with all its after revelations.

CHAPTER XIX.

CARLOTA.

Persons in positions of danger are prone to think of the good and evil of their lives, and to draw a balance in favor of one or the other. Pathaway did not attempt a very nice adjustment of his moral accounts; but felt, as all right-thinking men do in seasons of extremity, genuine regret that his life had been so barren of results, and so little productive of happiness to others. Because he indulged in reflections of this kind, he did not abandon all hope of escape, but revolved many plans in his mind.

Wiley maintained his position near the entrance of the hut, with his weapons ostentatiously paraded beside him; but the man was heavy with sleep. His recent visit to the world of dreams, and his sudden recall by Captain Hendricks, had left a lethargy upon his brain that continually urged him to a relapse into the same oblivious state. His first nap was to him like the first glass of the inebriate—giving him a strong inclination to a second. But he had a duty to perform which it would be dangerous to neglect. Mentally, he firmly determined that sleep should not close his eyelids till he was relieved of his charge. To keep the invidious enemy at arm's length, he arose and stood upon his feet; tiring of that position, and feeling fortified against surprise, he resumed his seat and smoked—stealing, without seeming to do so, frequent glances at his prisoner, to see if he would not so far forget his troubles as to yield

to the soothing power of slumber; for if appeared to him that a sleeping man was more easily guarded than one wide awake.

As the night wore on, the gray hunter seemed disposed to accommodate his keeper; his head gradually sank upon the floor, and his respiration was certainly indicative of slumber. Jack rejoiced at this, and though resolutely bent upon wakefulness, naturally employed less effort to maintain that condition. He began to nod, but had at first frequent brightenings-up; the latter grew less frequent, until his chin rested upon his chest, and he was fairly conquered. It was when his heavy breathing gave notice of this fact, that Pathaway's eyes unclosed. The sleep was genuine; there was no mistaking it. Pathaway raised himself upon his elbow, in effecting which his foot unintentionally came in contact with a fagot, making a slight noise that was sufficient to startle the sentinel, who straightened up galvanically and yawned. Pathaway fell back to his former position, and Jack, having an indistinct consciousness that all was right, was overpowered again in an instant. There's nothing one covets so much as sleep when it is forbidden; it becomes a thing inexpressibly desirable, and to Wiley it was more—irresistible.

Warned by his previous experiment, the prisoner acted with greater carefulness and quickness. As if by a single movement, he was on his feet and advancing upon Wiley, who, unfortunately for the former, carried into his dreams a wholesome fear of the wrath of Captain Hendricks. Pathaway was not conscious that he made the slightest noise; but something warned his watcher of danger—his instincts or his previously whetted sensibilities—for he sprang up like an automaton operated by springs, yet too late for successful resistance; for the hand of the young man was at his throat before he could grasp a weapon. He bore him to the ground, and the fellow felt fingers of steel upon his mouth before he could give the alarm, and knees planted like iron posts upon his chest.

"Be silent!" said Pathaway. "One sound from your lips seals your fate. Mind what I say! It is with me a matter of life and death; and if necessity calls for it, I shall not hesitate to sacrifice you as I would a beast of prey!"

Pathaway took his hand from Wiley's mouth, and drew a bowie that he had concealed at his back, between his hunting-frock and person. The brightness of the blade dazzled the eyes of the outlaw, and was the strongest argument for his silence that could have been employed. Jack knew his man; he saw his nerve, his power, his quickness of action, his firmness of purpose, at a glance; it was revealed to him by the blazing light in his eyes. He would have spoken and said: "I give up! I give up!" but could not, for the metallic fingers pressed him to suffocation. He made a consenting movement of the head, and the hunter relaxed the rigor of his grasp.

"For God's sake, don't kill me!" he gasped.

"Your life," answered Pathaway, "depends entirely on your obedience. Open your mouth—you must be gagged."

Wiley wished to remonstrate, but deadly fear kept him mute. He obeyed the imperious order with a helpless, humiliated reluctance that needed no interpreter. The hunter crowded in without ceremony a large piece of buckskin, cut from the ruffian's own hunting-frock. There was no feminine delicacy or softness about the operation; it was prompt, rough, and efficacious.

"Turn upon your face!" said Pathaway, withdrawing his weight from his chest.

With a sullen rattling in his throat—the new application was too thoroughly made to produce anything but an uncomfortable sense of strangulation—Wiley rolled over, when the hunter cut two stout strips from the back of the garment that had already contributed to his convenience, with one of which he tied his wrists, while the other performed the same of fice for his feet. It was not an emergency that allowed of being careful about trifles, and it may be confidently asserted that the ligatures were not daintily applied; therefore, if they were tightly drawn, and the hard knots sank into the flesh, the circumstances furnished a ready excuse.

When Wiley floundered over upon his back again, his squint eye had a more marked obliquity than usual. He tried to form words, which resulted only in a kind of pectoral murmur. The hunter bent over him a moment, with a smile of triumph and contempt.

"You see, rascal," he said, "that things change sometimes quicker than we anticipate. Not long since you were my jailor; now it is different. Had you been the prisoner and I the sleepy sentinel, you would have killed me."

The young hunter paused, thrust Jack's pistols into his belt, appropriated his ammunition, and took his rifle, then added:

"One blow would end your miserable existence, but I forbear. I shall stop at the outside of the hut a short time to see how you behave. If you struggle and try to get out—I'll—visit you again!"

There was too much meaning in the man's voice to admit of doubt, although the threat was used more to intimidate than otherwise; for the hunter did not stop at the door only long enough to determine upon the direction to pursue, then moved quickly and softly away.

The night lay still and dark on the outlaw encampment. The supper-fires had waned and died out, and the gorged and weary mountaineers were wrapped in slumber. The hour was favorable, and Pathaway's heart beat fast with gratitude, as his eyes swept from hut to hut and took in the scene. They had long been used to security, which had never been disturbed, probably, by the intrusion of enemies since they adopted their lawless trade. In their fastnesses they were safe, and Sleep came to them without the companionship of Fear.

The young man remembered the stories he had heard of the difficulty of getting out of the valley when once in it; but he apprehended no serious trouble in finding Trapper Trace—the key to the home of the outlaws. He passed onward rapidly, and the huts were fading from view, when a figure appeared in the darkness. It was a woman—it was Carlota! Pathaway experienced a sickening sense of disappointment. Was he perceived? Possibly not. He stood still, hoping that the night would prove his shield. She had discovered him—she approached, with uncertainty at first, with decision as she drew near. Her manner was indicative of surprise.

"Be silent!" said Pathaway, authoritatively, in tones suppressed and penetrating.

"Do you command?" answered Carlota, haughtily.

"You are a woman; do not force me to treat you as if you were not. I am escaping, and I will not be baffled!"

"But if I choose to raise my voice and say: 'Ho—'"

"Pathaway sprang forward, and put his hand over her mouth.

"Emergencies require prompt action," he said, with sternness.

She did not stir, made no effort to shake him off, but stood, calm, disdainful, dignified.

Pathaway held her by the wrist.

"Before the matter of life and death, all other subjects sink into insignificance," he added. "We even sacrifice other lives to save our own."

"I know!" returned Carlota, coldly. "Carlota, the wild girl of the mountains, cannot be influenced by menace."

"Then, by Heaven! I will use the strength that Nature has given me to some purpose!"

Pathaway threw his right arm around her waist, and was in the act of covering her mouth with his left hand, when she said "Stop!" with so much imperiousness, that the last movement was arrested.

"What would you have?" she asked, in a voice that, through some emotion, was tremulous. "Is there nothing to compel woman but threats? Did I say I would betray you?"

She looked deprecatingly at the hunter.

"You were about to call for help—to sound the alarm through the encampment," returned Pathaway.

"You did not allow me to proceed; my say remained unsaid. I was about to tell you that I had only to call out, 'Ho, mountaineers—'"

"For God's sake, girl, desist!" cried the hunter, again stopping her.

"Did I raise my voice above its natural tone?" she asked, in a voice of rebuke. "Could I not have shrieked before this as woman only can shriek? Was it in your power, or is it now, to hinder me from sending a thrill of life and activity through yonder silent camp?"

Carlota drew herself up more and more, and spoke in the voice of a woman who feels herself wounded in a sensitive part of her nature.

"Carlota!" answered Pathaway, changing

his manner to one more friendly, "I believe I have mistaken you; if I have, forgive me, and allow me to depart without delay. Consider my position. Remember that at your request I spared the life of Hendricks—your father, husband, or lover, I know not which. I appeal to your compassion; I throw myself upon your mercy!"

"Not till threats had failed; not till you had laid a rough hand upon me!" answered the girl, gloomily.

"It was the instinct of self-preservation—an instinct ever active and always pardonable."

"But not easily forgotten," she said, in accents slightly sneering.

"Girl! girl! every moment is inexpressibly valuable. You are detaining me in the very jaws of death."

"Have you asked my assistance?" asked Carlota, with a proud glance at the young man.

"Yes, I have—I do!" returned the hunter, earnestly.

"And if I interpose no obstacle, will you find your way from the Valley, think you?"

"Do not doubt it! Once in the bridle-path, and I am safe; for I am hardy, experienced, and swift."

"I have heard of your exploits. You are brave and steady, but you do not understand the ways of woman. Follow me!"

Carlota turned and walked from the encampment toward Trapper Trace, Pathaway treading in her footsteps with silent yet excessive surprise.

Presently they came to a horse saddled and bridled.

"What means this?" Pathaway inquired.

"Can you not imagine why this animal is here?" answered Carlota, curtly.

"Dare I believe that you meditated my escape, and provided this horse for the purpose?"

"Believe what you will; the creature is now yours."

"This is kind—this is generous! I complained too soon of your ingratitude."

"Say nothing," replied the girl, proudly.

"A mistake once made is made forever." She paused and struggled with some powerful feeling. "I will provide you with a guide," she added.

Pathaway looked up uneasily; she noticed the glance, and coloring, remarked:

"Still suspicious of treachery. Your sex is ever ready to do injustice to ours. You tempt me to abandon you. Don't answer, for the night wears on. I must exact one condition of you."

"Condition? I thought a woman was unconditional; that what she does is on trust and free."

"In matters that relate only to herself, it may be so; but where others are concerned, it is different. These men must not be betrayed. You must promise that you will not return with hostile intentions."

Carlota considered him with earnest attention. It being dark, she advanced her face close to his to catch its expression.

"Do you hesitate?" she asked.

"You put me in a painful position," answered Pathaway, much embarrassed. "While I do not wish to refuse a request of my benefactress, I should be wanting in duty to mankind did I give the pledge you require. It would give me pleasure, truly, to drive out these bad men and bring safety to the lone hunter and trapper, and avenge the wrongs of those who have fallen victims to their wantonness and cupidity."

"It is as I suspected!" said she, patting the ground with her foot. "Your wish and intentions are easily read. You are rejoicing at this moment in anticipation of a successful return with overpowering forces at your back—a party of soldiers, perhaps, from the nearest military post; for I have heard rumors that an expedition was to be sent against us by the United States government. In this manner you purpose to repay my good offices."

"I will promise," replied Pathaway anon, "to lead no troops or armed men against you; but I cannot pledge my word not to visit Trapper Valley myself. And you forget, fair Carlota," he added, playfully, "that your own presence here may have something to do with my movements. Charms like yours—"

"Enough! enough! Don't insult me!" interrupted the girl, resentfully. "An empty compliment cannot deceive me, but hypocrisy will make me angry. I waive all pledges; I

exact nothing. Remain here a few moments, and I will send you one that will guide you faithfully to the camp of your friend."

"Woman will be woman!" murmured Pathaway. "Pardon me, Carlota, there is one subject of which it were unmanly not to speak; it has too long escaped me in the excitement of the night. It is of the Frenchman's daughter I would ask?"

"This is no time for continued questioning," replied Carlota, hurriedly, and evidently startled by the query. "Do you—do you know this Ninon?" she added, dropping her voice.

"I never saw her," said Pathaway, "but the claims of common humanity appeal to me strongly in her behalf. What has been her fate? Will you, can you do nothing to save her? Portneuf escaped; I have seen him."

"Hendricks was right; he has indeed much to fear from you. This is the first time I ever betrayed him; but no matter; it is done. Do not stir till the guide joins you."

Carlota walked away quickly and was soon out of sight, hidden by the darkness and interposing trees.

CHAPTER XX.

INDIAN JOE.

Pathaway awaited the coming of the promised guide, not without feelings of distrust. Perhaps she had changed her mind and would send, not a guide, but a party of outlaws to take him back to captivity and its consequences. His anxiety grew momentarily greater, and his doubts had begun to assume reality, when the sound of horses' feet admonished him that some one approached. He drew a pistol, an unnecessary precaution, for the horseman proved the expected guide—an Indian boy of fourteen or fifteen years of age.

"Come from white squaw; show pale face the way," said the boy, taking his place in advance.

"Carlota sent you," said Pathaway, quite assured that there was no mistake.

"Joe tell you once, no tell same thing twice. Ingin no ask question; white man ask question," answered the boy, curtly.

Perceiving that his guide was not disposed to talk, the gray hunter followed him silently, thinking of Carlota, of Sebastian, Nick, and many other things connected with his recent experiences.

It was near morning, and the young Indian made what haste he could, urging his horse to a gallop when the way permitted. In many places the path was dangerous, but the animals appeared accustomed to traveling it, and bore them onward with sure and trusty feet. The day dawned at the moment they were leaving the Trace, and at this point the hunter supposed that his guide would leave him; but he kept on before, choosing with evident skill the most accessible ways, and directing his course, as he could readily perceive, toward the spot where he had met Hendricks the previous night. The sun was high in the heavens when they reached the scene of the contest.

"Here, I suppose, we shall part," said Pathaway.

"No part; Joe go on," replied the boy, composedly.

"But you'll be missed. What account will you give of your absence? If Captain Hendricks should know of your agency in this matter, I fear you would not come off with whole skin."

"Joe no 'fraid Cap'n. Go with you to white man's camp—Nick, you call him."

Joe glanced at Pathaway, then looked fixedly at his horse's head.

"Did your mistress—did Carlota bid you attend me so far?" asked the hunter.

"Tole me stay long's I pleased. Perhaps Joe no go back; perhaps he go here, there, everywhere—no know where he go. Be warrior sometime."

"Then you are at liberty to do as you wish?" answered the hunter, who had been so much preoccupied during the ride that he had bestowed little notice upon Joe; but now thought it worth while to observe him more closely. He was a well-clad, well-formed lad, who looked capable of making his way in the world as efficiently as any of his race. His long black hair hung straight and curlless upon his face and neck. He was quite dark, even for an Indian, and old enough to delight in paint and plumes. He had, clearly, been a

favorite at the Valley, else he would not have been tricked out so bravely.

"I spoke only for your good. I care not to urge you to return to those lawless men; but you are too young to go on the war-path, and your tribe may be distant," added Pathaway presently.

"Can hunt, fish, take care hisself, Joe can. No need mind 'bout Joe."

"How long since you left your people?" asked Pathaway.

"Two, three, four moons ago. White squaw give me clothes. Plenty to eat; no work; Joe no like work. Let squaw do work."

The young Indian touched his horse with his hand and quickened his movements, so that the hunter was obliged to put his own into a gallop to keep pace with him. In a short time they rode up to Nick Whiffles' hut. Nick stood in the door, rifle in hand. His pleasure and astonishment were about equal.

"I'd about give ye up, by gracious!" he exclaimed. "Took a tramp arter ye last night and was jest startin' ag'in. Reckoned you'd turn up; told Sebastian so, but he wouldn't hear to it, as 'twere, and nothin' would pacify him. Consarned funny boy, he is! And not funny, neither, but peculiar constituted. He didn't sleep a wink last night, but jest set by the fire and moped, goin' to the door every five minutes to look and listen. Been on the war-path, I allow? Come back with two hosses and a prisoner. Well, you're welcome, anyway. What's been the diffikilty?"

Sebastian came out while Nick was making these observations; his first impulse, obviously, was to run and seize Pathaway's hand, but he checked it, and stopped in an attitude indicative of surprise and joy.

The hunter hastened to greet him.

"What kind o' baggage you got here?" asked Nick, eyeing the Indian sharply.

Joe had not dismounted; he was looking earnestly at Sebastian.

"This dark-skinned youth has been my guide from Trapper Valley," replied Pathaway.

"Trapper Valley!" exclaimed Sebastian, clasping his hands, recoiling, and fixing his attention upon the guide.

The hunter observed the start and sudden change of attitude.

"So you have been in the Valley and got back alive?" said Nick; "and that's 'stonishin'. Ing'in boy"—to Joe—"hop down and let me see what you look like."

The boy did not honor this mandate with the least attention; but immediately, in obedience to a sign from Pathaway, sprang lightly to the ground.

"A right nice-'pearin' boy; though I must say, there's a slight tetch of dandyism about him, and uses more paint nor is needful on common occasions. Trot round a little, youngster, and let me see your paces," added Nick, eyeing the boy in his own whimsical manner, who, during this address, was staring at Sebastian. In fact, a duel of eyes was persistently going on between the half-breed and Joe.

"So you've been to the Valley?" said Nick, abruptly changing the subject. "Jest turn out the beasts, and let me hear all about it. My own animile is yender, and they'll soon make friends, I allow. No danger their runnin' off. That's it! throw the bridles and saddles down there. Now, sir, what have you seen and heard?"

Sebastian pointed at Pathaway's hunting-frock with something like a cry of terror; Nick, following the direction of the lad's finger, observed that there were several perforations in it, which had the appearance of having been made by a sharp instrument.

"A diffikilty, I swear to gracious!" cried Nick. "I am, and allers was, right about the matter o' diffikilties. Every man must have 'em; they will come; you can't keep 'em off. Yea, they begin the very minute the crown of one's head touches the atmosphere. The fust breath is drawn with diffikilty, as well as the last. Then comes teetthin', and who pin'-cough, and measles—mumps, scarlet fever, and vaccination. Then there's the very-lord—which is sometimes worse nor the very devil—not to mention cuts, and bumps, and lickin's at school. Speakin' o' bumps, reminds me that I allers had a pesky disposition to tumble down when I's a little un. I's a fust-rate climber, but that was all the worse for me for the furdur I got up, the furdur I had

to fall. There's wasn't a pair o' stairs in the house that I hadn't gone down rattlety-bang 'fore I's 'leven months old. Neighbors used to think we was larnin' to play the bass-drum—there was sich a continuoal thumpin' and clatterin' about the premises. And sich a voice as I had when I's two year old! It was so developed by p'ison diffikilties, that it had the power and vollum of a bassoon played by a critter as had no regard for the human race. You'd oughter heerd me arter fallin' from an apple-tree or a gum-spruce! Wasn't it music, by mighty! Sebastian, don't gape at that Ing'in so; Ing'in, don't gape at Sebastian. Have knowed boys to fall down in fits by starin' at each other in that way. You've broke the thread of my remarks by your ill manners. Your huntin'-frock is a good 'eal hacked up, Pathaway."

Nick paused, and kept glancing from the two boys to the hunter in a somewhat anxious fashion.

"To tell you all in a few words, I encountered the fellow Hendricks yesterday. We had words; he was insolent—I knocked him down."

"I'm glad of that, by gracious!" interposed Nick. "You'd oughter knocked him arter he was down."

Sebastian was leaning forward, listening intently to this graphic account.

"We arranged a meeting to take place at sunset, on the very spot where we then stood, which was a beautiful level, covered with waving grass. We met; I was the victor; my adversary stood disarmed before me."

Up to this point, the Indian boy had shown little interest; he now looked steadily at Pathaway.

"Hendricks was at my mercy, when a woman interposed to save him."

"Carlota! Carlota!" muttered Portneuf, who had joined them a moment before; for this conversation took place outside of the hut.

"Yes, it was the girl Carlota; and, before I was aware of danger, I was surrounded by the outlaws of Trapper Valley."

"Wicked woman!" exclaimed Sebastian.

The young Indian darted an angry glance at him.

"I was a prisoner," returned Pathaway; "and, after going a short distance, was mounted and conducted to Trapper Valley by its eastern, and to us unknown, entrance."

"What did you see?" inquired Nick.

"Only a few smoke-colored huts standing not far from Trapper Trace, which is to the Valley like a little rill emptying into a lake. All the mysteries of the place were not revealed to me. They kept from me the knowledge of their most secret lurking-places."

"No doubt," said Nick. "I allow them lurkin'-places is not fur from the spot where we found Portneuf."

"I was placed under the guidance of Jack Wiley, with the promise of a short shrift and a sure cord in the morning. He slept; I overpowered and bound him. I left the hut and was hastening away, when I met—"

"Who did you meet?" cried Sebastian, impatiently.

The young Indian regarded the lad with a lowering brow.

"Carlota, the female outlaw," added Pathaway.

"What did she say? what did she do?" asked Sebastian, whose interest in the narration increased.

"I did not quite comprehend her nature. I was savage with her at first; but she taught me a different lesson."

Joe's eyes glistened like fire.

"The woman was not all dead in Carlota; she had already planned my escape; and I came near marring the whole by my impetuosity."

"Was this—this Carlota—this leader of mountain outlaws—this masculine woman—was she, I say, handsome?" demanded Sebastian Delaunay.

The boy Joe did not take his fixed gaze from Pathaway: there might have been both curiosity and eagerness in the glitter of his black eyes.

"er thought seriously of that," said Pathaway, smiling; "but now, as I recall her features, one by one, I pronounce her pretty. To speak more intelligibly, she has a certain wild beauty that many of our sex could not dare with impunity. She is brilliant and dashing; and there are those easily dazzled

by such qualities." Then to Joe: "What think you, boy? Is you- mistress handsome?"

The glittering eyes suddenly sought the ground, rested there a short time, then returned, inquiringly, to Pathaway.

"To them that like her, she handsome; to them that no like her, no handsome."

Joe shot another eye-bolt at Sebastian.

"What do you care whether she's handsome or t'otherwise, little un? You a'n't old 'nough to go courtin' yet; and if you was, I wouldn't never give my consent for you to marry a female captain of pirates. No honest gal would keep sich company. Oh Lord, no!"

A little stream of humor purled from Nick's eyes.

"The long and short on't was," he added, "she give ye a guide and a hoss to ride; and so here ye are, safe and sound. Now I'll wager Smuggler agin a common pup, that you made a p'ison diffikilty in the gal's breast; and not diffikilty neither, but a commotion in her bussom; and not her bussom exactly, but her heart—which is a muskle condemned apt to git out o' kilter."

Sebastian smiled, and Indian Joe changed his position uneasily.

"The girl is wanting neither in sense nor beauty," remarked Pathaway; "and I am not the man to believe that I make a conquest in every quarter where I may receive a favor. She is surely a wonderful creature, both in conversation and spirit; and her language is sufficient evidence that she has not always associated with such characters."

"I didn't see her but one or two time," said Portneuf; "but I s'all say, that I think she look at me kind. She has—what you call him?—courage—le grand courage. I have been waitin' and waitin', but you have not speak of my child ene time—nevare, nevare!"

The Frenchman displayed much emotion.

"Believe me, my friend, it was because I had nothing to say. I would gladly have relieved your paternal anxiety had it been in my power. I bring no news of Ninon."

The voice of Andrew Jeanjean came plaintively from the hut; he was singing:

"Oh, the trapper's daughter—
Oh, the trapper's daughter!"

"Our camp-fire must rise somewhere else to-morrow night," said Nick, thoughtfully.

Smuggler came out and barked, while the horses (just turned loose), which had strayed a short distance from the camp, erected their heads and ears, and evinced signs of fear. Pathaway looked beyond them, and beheld the mysterious grizzly bear.

CHAPTER XXI.

INDIAN JOE AT CAMP.

A curious party assembled at the morning meal. Individually, they were singularly unlike, yet each manifested a noticeable interest in the other. Nick was uneasy, though continually striving to appear cheerful, endeavoring to inspirit the rest by his humorous sallies and unique stories. Pathaway was serious, Portneuf sad, Sebastian timid and at times agitated, Indian Joe inquisitive with his eyes, taciturn with his lips, while the face of Andrew Jeanjean wore its usual mild and unmeaning expression. Each was watchful of the other without wishing to have the fact perceived. Sebastian, unquestionably, shrank from the presence of Joe—his frequent flushes and evident perturbation being a source of annoyance and anxiety to Nick.

"It's them mean chills ag'in," he said in an aside voice to Pathaway, but which was audible to all present; "and not the chills, neither, but the hot stage of the disorder."

The gray hunter hinted that he had not before referred to this particular intermittent as affecting the lad, but had alluded to whooping-cough and measles as the active agents of his infirmities.

"You misunderstood me, colonel!"—Nick often addressed Pathaway by this title—"you sartinly did."

He shook his head gravely, as if he knew he was doomed to be misinterpreted generally.

"I think I know as well's another what ails him. It's ager—ager in its most violent and chromatic form. Tien't the kind they have in the clearin's, but ager run wild in the Nor'-west. I seed a whole tribe of Iagins shook to bits with it some twenty odd year ago. Fust they shook off an arm or a leg, then the arms and legs kept righ: on shakin' on their own responsibility, as 'twere. It was a stirrin' spettacolo, I tell ye! I passed over the ground

the next day, and you couldn't find a piece bigger'n your finger, nor two that could be put together ag'in as they 'riginally b'longed. It looked as if it had rained Ingins there for more'n a week. But the little chunks wasn't quiet by no means; each individooal one quiverin' as though life depended on't. I'm 'ware that this don't 'pear natril, and I don't insist on your b'lievin' it verbattim et scatteratim, which, by the way, is all the Latin I haven't forgot, though Doctor Whiffles can reel it off to ye by the yard. Ah, sich a man as the doctor was for a speech! Speeches a'n't of much 'count up here, but at Selkirk and other clearin's they carry all afore 'em. He was captain of a fire company, my brother was—that was afore he received his degree; and 'twasn't afore, neither; for come to think on't, I b'lieve he never got a diplomy, though he'd oughter, by mighty! On the 'casion I refer to, he presented a tin trumpet to the former captam. He come on with his speech all writ, and full o' confidence, though his j'int's shook like p'ison. I wasn't there, but he talked beautiful, barrin' losin' his place a few times, which rather took him off his pins, as 'twere. He wasn't a critter to be put down, not'stannin' his condemned mem'ry, which would on'y hold a sartin number of syllables at a time. He talked of danger, flames, and water, then of water, flames, and danger, which give it a interestin' variety. Then the way he handled burnin' houses was prodigious, rushin' through walls o' solid blaze, scatterin' firebrands right and left, resuvin' sleepin' families, and tossin' babies from the garret winders to be ketched by the multitude below. What a effort that would a been if his thumb hadn't slipped at some o' the most startlin' p'int's! Oh Lord, yes!"

"No doubt," said Pathaway, absently, for during Nick's episode he had been studying the features of Andrew Jeanjean. "What do you think we had better do?" he added, abruptly.

Nicholas glanced significantly at the Indian boy.

"I don't think that it's a good plan to discuss matters of this kind afore strangers."

"I'll answer for his fidelity!" replied Pathaway.

"That's more'n I'll do!" returned Nick, dryly.

"An Indian! an Indian!" exclaimed Sebastian, pointing.

Nick looked up and saw Multnomah, the Shoshoné, standing at the door.

"Come in, Ingin—come in! There's allers room at my table for one more, though I ha'n't got fairly to housekeepin'. Flop down and take your chance with us. Sonny"—to Sebastian—"can't you saw off another slice, and don't be so keerful about s'ilin' your fingers."

"No stay—no eat," answered the Shoshoné, gravely. "Multnomah would speak to Doubledark."

"He hears ye, Ingin; speak on. Any signs of a diffikilty, eh?"

"The Shoshoné has hunted and trapped with Doubledark. He is his friend and brother."

"True, true! And barrin' the color your skin, which isn't 'cordin' to natur—my natur, leastwise—you're as honest a human—Ingins in course is human—as can be diskivered atween here and the Big Red. I know you've got a weakness for skulps, but the best on us has failin's."

Nicholas regarded the Shoshoné with friendly eyes—eyes that expressed far more than what he was saying. Then to Pathaway:

"There's them that would not trust that Inginsause he isn't what he isn't, which is a white man; but, Lord bless ye, that skin o' his'n isn't thicker nor a sheet o' paper; and arter you git inside an't you can't tel the difference. Take that Ingins and skia him, and I'll defy anybody to tell what race he b'longs to."

"It is not the skin that makes Ingins, Ingins inside. Nick love one thing, Multnomah another. The prairie wolf is not like the buffalo, nor the panther like the antelope," said the Shoshoné.

"It may be so; we won't dispute about it; but the inside of one watch is a good 'eal like the inside of another, though some'll run faster nor others. There's clocks, too, but the watch principle is in clocks, I allow."

"Brother, I did not come to talk of the way in which the Great Spirit has made us. Have you seen no clouds in the sky? Will it be fair to-morrow?"

Nick and the Shoshoné looked at each other.

"Ingins, the heavens are not clear; there are dark places up aloft; there are signs in the east," said the former.

"I am glad that Doubledark is not blind. If he sees, why is he here? Why does he not fly to a covert like the birds of the air?"

"The birds leave no trail," muttered Nick, musingly.

"The birds are wise. Not to man alone is wisdom given. Even the snake knows when his enemy is near, and creeps into its hole."

While the Shoshoné stood grave and dignified, his eyes might occasionally be detected resting upon Sebastian and Indian Joe; but his stoical face told no tales of his thoughts.

"Shoshoné," said Pathaway, addressing the Indian, "speak plainly and not in the language of figures."

"I speak according to my nature," answered Multnomah, proudly, and with a slight frown. "The Master of Life never speaks to his children but in signs. He does not say: 'There will be a storm;' but He makes the air heavy and puts a cloud in the sky. He does not say: 'It will be fair to-morrow,' but makes the sun set red, as if it went down in a battle-field."

"Where will the sky be clear?" asked Nick.

"It will not be clear, but Multnomah would go to the North. I have noticed that some birds build their nests high among the rocks in the clefts and crevices."

"Birds are not fools," quoth Nick.

"We learn from the meanest things," responded the chief.

"But man, being gifted with speech," said Pathaway, "should use it intelligibly."

"My talk is to those that can understand me. Those that do not take my meaning when I speak as Nature has taught me, would not be profited if I spoke in the language of the pale faces." Then to Nick: "Doubledark, you have heard me; you can read the book of the sky and the earth?"

"I can, and I thank you, Ingins, for your friendly visit. I hope it'll be a long time afore you strike the trail to the happy huntin' grounds; but when you do, may the journey be pleasant, and the land o' souls to your likin'. That's the worst wish I wish you or your tribe, though there's them 'mong white men as has different feelin's."

"Doubledark, I have said, and I go."

Multnomah turned and stalked rapidly away.

"An Ingins is an Ingins," muttered Nick, "and allers will be!"

"I can scarcely desire them different," observed Pathaway. "I find much in the character of the true type of Indian to admire. Their method of communication is borrowed from Nature. The earth and the sky are indeed their books."

"Books I've studied a good 'eal myself. I've often looked up when layin' campless on the prairie, and seen the book of the heavens opened wide afore me; every star tellin' me which way to go to find a certain lake or river, mountain or valley."

"I have read that page, and experienced a deep pleasure in the solitary companionship of Nature," replied the hunter.

"I never was much of a 'stronomer, and don't know one consternation—"

"Constellation!" whispered Sebastian.

"It makes no odds," quoth Nick. "It's writ both ways, though the way you speak it may be the properest in a grammatical p'int. As I was sayin', I never knew one constellation from another by name as laid down in the books, though I've named 'em to suit myself. One I call the Buffaler, another the Catamount, a third the Wolf, a fourth the Serpent, and so on. Individooal stars I ginerly names arter my hosses—favorite one, leastwise; sich as Suggestion, Firebug, etc. It's a mighty savin' o' study, and 'cordin' to Natur, too, which is a good schoolmaster, and 'bout the on'y one I ever had; for I never went to school but a couple o' days in my life. The master called me up, and sez he: 'What's that?' sez he, p'intin' to the letter A. 'Don't know,' sez I. 'Don't know, do you?' sez he, givin' me a cut across the legs with a stick. 'Try and find out,' sez he. 'It's no use,' blubbered I, caperin' about the room. 'We'll see to that,' sez he. 'What did your pairnts send you here for? Look right at that, sir!' I sidled up to the schoolmaster, a rubbin' the calf of one leg, then of the other, openin' my eyes as wide as never I could. 'It looks like a harrer,' sez

I. 'Oh! it looks like a harrer, does it? Now what does it look like?' and whack, whack went the stick over my head and ears. 'Come here to make mischief, didn't ye?' sez he; 'to set a bad example afore the risin' generation, and to p'ison the minds of the rest o' the scholars!' With that I looked round, and seed jest three melancholy little varmint's present. The fact on't was, the marster was ina 'cause his institootion waen't patronised at better."

"I don't care nothin' 'bout the risin' generation nor you nother!" sez I, fairly worked up with pain and anger. And with that, I throwed a lead inkstand at his head, and run home fast as my legs could carry me. My mother wanted me to go ag'in the next day, but I wouldn't. 'Boys and gals allers has to be licked,' sez she, 'when they're l'arnin' to read. It's impossible to git the l'arnin' into 'em 'thout wallopin,' and the harder they're beat the quicker they'll git their eddication."

"I pulled up my tattered trowsers, and showed her the great welts on my legs. 'I know it,' sez she, shakin' her head sadly, 'but it has to be did. It's jest like whoopin'-cough and measles, and we can't help it; but you can hide ahind the hedge, and throw stones at the marster when he goes home in the artemoon.' My legs didn't smart much arter that, and the marster didn't stay long in the neighborhood."

"Uncle Nick, have you forgotten the grizzly bear and the Shoshoné?" whispered Sebastian.

"Forgot?" repeated Nick. "Not a tall! But what's the use bein' miser'ble long's we can be t'otherwise? Depend on't, Nick Whiffles don't lose his mem'ry for trifles. When, as that Ingins said, there's signs in the airth and sky, I'm on hand to look at 'em, and be guided by 'em. To-night we'll sleep at Black Rock."

Sebastian recoiled, as if Nicholas had pushed him backward.

"Black Rock?" he repeated. "Surely you will not take me—that is, you will not go to such a dismal spot. The remembrance of that dark stream, and those frowning rocks, together with—"

"I know," interposed Nick, hastily, "that it's a dull, pokerish-lookin' place; but it may sarve us for a refuge for a night. Boys o' your age oughtn't to be afraid of ghosts and things." Then, to Pathaway: "It's reported, you see, that a murder was committed there, and this sparrer-legged boy has got the notion into his head that murdered folks come back."

"I think you once informed me that you witnessed a tragedy there?" said Pathaway.

"Almost—not quite. The loveliest, the pootiest, and the best! O Lord, yes!"

The last words seemed to be addressed more to himself than anybody else.

"You returned her to her friends, if I remember rightly?"

"Whatever I tole ye, so it 'twas. Yes, I sent her home, though 'twas hard parting' with one so interestin', and so handsome; one 'thout knowin' it, that had insensibly twined herself round my 'fections."

"You loved her?" queried Pathaway.

"The ground she walked on!" said Nick. "And 'twasn't none o' your moonshiny, wishy-washy, sentimental stuff, nuther; but the real, airnest, substantial, stick-to-ye principle that never gits tired, and never wears out." Indian Joe and Sebastian glanced at each other; then the eyes of the latter sought the earth, finally wandering back to Nick.

"We'll go to Black Rock, Nicholas," he said. "I should like to see the spot where you performed so brave an action."

Indian Joe walked from the hut, Nick watching him as he went out.

"Keep sight o' that critter, colonel. I don't like the looks of him too well. I think 'twould be a good plan to put him under some restraint, sich as tyin' his legs and lashin' him to a saplin'. Fust thing we know, he'll be off. Likely as any way, he's come 'mong us a sort o' spy; if I thought he had, I'd go out and choke him, by mighty! I seed the Shoshoné lookin' at him right smart, and I's glad he's bright enough not speak out no plainer."

"I am confident that he may be trusted, though, placed as we are, we should observe every reasonable caution," said Pathaway.

"I'll go out and cross-examine him, as 'twere; for I thought the conversation interested him rayther too much, seein' he's clear Ingins, and we haven't nothin' in common."

Nick arose and followed Joe, who had proceeded toward the spot where the horses were

grazing. The trapper approached the tawny boy with the soft, elastic step of an Indian. He touched him upon the shoulder. Joe turned, with a notable start of surprise.

"You a'n't a perfect redskin," said the trapper, quietly. "That's a kind of insex that's seldom taken onawares. An Ingin, in the reg'lar business of trail and war-path, wouldn't 'lowed me to steal a march on him."

Joe put out his hands, and stepped back several paces, while the paint seemed to whiten on his face.

"Joe young; Joe never followed war-path. White man great hunter, very cunning!"

The voice of the young savage was not clear, but husky with a predominant feeling.

"Can't say the same of you, by gracious. What you been lookin' at them animiles for?"

"Joe tired of stayin' in lodge. No know what pale-faces say; their talk is strange to Ingin Joe."

"Now you're lyin', you little scamp!" exclaimed Nick, seizing the lad by the collar, and holding him with the grasp of a vice. "I obsarved ye, you young serpent! You heerd and understood as well as I or the little 'un; and you not on'y understood, but you showed too much interest by considerable."

At this point, Nick lifted Joe up and set him down again several times, as if to show him his strength.

"I've killed a good many Ingin boys fust an' last, off and on," quoth the trapper, carelessly; "and I don't sleep none the worse for't."

Joe trembled at first, but gaining courage, spoke for himself:

"What you go to hurt Joe? Joe boy—you man; if Joe man and you boy, Joe no choke, no shake!"

"Ingin, you know too much. I'm less disposed to trust ye than I was afore. You may be all right, but I'm blest if I believe it! Where there's any doubt, it's best to treat an honest man as if he's a rogue. Arter this, you'll consider yourself a prisoner o' war; and not o' war neither, but of sarcumstances."

At this announcement, Joe became highly indignant, his anger showing itself in his flushed face and sparkling eyes. At one moment, Nick believed his passion would find vent in a flood of tears, but a sharp, though evident struggle checked the impulse. He stood with his chest heaving like a sullen and petulant woman.

"What!" he exclaimed; then checked himself, as if he had manifested too much feeling, or said something that he ought not to.

"Did you say 'What?'" demanded Nick, stroking his beard with his disengaged hand. "Have you 'arned so soon to talk like white folks? A mighty sharp and obsarvin' lad you be, I allow."

"Joe say, What for you 'buse Ingin boy? He friend of pale face; guide him long way; bring him here safe; no let bad white man hurt him."

"Jes' so!" answered Nick, mildly. "Sartin—zactly. You took him from the mean skunks, and I'm 'bleeged to ye; but men in danger don't stan' on nice distinctions. You know what distinctions is, don't ye, redskin?"

Joe shook his head very slowly.

"In course not! A heathen oughtn't to know flambergasted words. I'm glad you don't; for I don't like to see insex of your color imitatin' their betters: so, beggin' your pardon, I'll jest trot ye back to camp."

With a remorseless grip upon his arm that was nearly too much for Joe's stoicism, the trapper led, or rather dragged, him toward the hut.

"I won't hurt ye—not a bit—Oh Lord, no!"—the boy was ready to cry with pain—"nor I won't injure your feelin's, or deprive ye of none o' your nat'ral rights; but jest tie your legs, and hitch ye up to a little tree till you're wanted; not 'cause I've got anythin' agin ye, for I ha'n't; but to keep ye from runnin' away."

"Joe no run; no go to the Valley; no tell." "I know ye wont, Ingin. It isn't in the 'natur' o' things for ye to git away arter I've tied ye up."

Nick looked at his captive, and saw two large tears trembling upon his long lashes.

"I'm glad none o' your kith and kin is here to see that!" added Nick. "Mong your people, cryin' is left princip'ly to the squaws. Warriors don't 'low the feelin's of their hearts to work up as fur as the eyes."

Nicholas had, by this time, reached the camp. Pathaway came out to remonstrate

with him about his treatment of the boy.

"He is a mere child," he said, "and to me has thus far been faithful. I must protest against undue severity."

"Sartin; it's your priverlege to pertest. But when life is at stake, we musn't stan' at bearin' down a trifle on human natur'; providin', allers, that Ingin natur' is of that sort. The missioners think 'tis; but, arter all that's said and done, they're heathen—not knowin' a Bible from a pack o' keerds. Howsomnever—we must git ready for a start. Portneuf, whip a string round this youngster's wrists—arter which, take a turn round a saplin' of some magnitood, and keep your eye on him till I git back; I'm goin' to take a look at the signs hereabouts. By usin' my fakilities to the best advantage, I may git hints that'll prove sarviceable. We shall be hunted like hares; but I trust we shall be able to put cunnin' agin cunnin', and throw the hounds from the scent."

Joe unresistingly suffered his hands to be bound, though he cast, occasionally, reproachful glances at Pathaway. Repeating his admonition to the Frenchman to keep a strict watch over Joe, Nick thoughtfully left camp to test the power of his educated faculties and sharpened instincts.

As soon as he was out of sight, the gray hunter approached the youthful Indian, and said, soothingly:

"Do not be grieved, my lad, at this treatment. You shall come to no harm. Submit patiently to the humors of Nick Whiffles, who, I am sure, will not wrong you intentionally."

He then examined the cord about his wrists, and, finding it rather tight, loosened it.

Joe said nothing—neither expressed his thanks nor his resentment—but stood with downcast eyes and moody brow.

CHAPTER XXII.

NICK GETS INFORMATION ABOUT HIMSELF.

All remained quiet at the little camp in the wilderness. The day passed without bringing fresh adventure or new signs of the nearness of enemies. The only observable difference of departure from the common routine was, that the fire was extinguished after the morning meal; nor was it lighted again till nearly night, and then kept burning but long enough to prepare their simple articles of food. Both Nick and Pathaway were outlying the camp during the greater part of the day, to note those evidences of foes perceptible to experienced eyes alone, and utterly invisible to the novice, however developed his natural perspicacity. Many times did Doubledark ascend the hills and rising grounds in the vicinity, and cast searching glances toward the Valley, the eastern slopes, and the whole surrounding tract, far as his vision could reach.

As soon as the sun had veiled his glories behind the mountains, Nick led the horses to the door, and covered their feet with large strips of buffalo and deer-skin—observing extraordinary care in the performance.

"Man," he said, "that hasn't been gifted with the instine's of the lower animiles, has reason to make up for't. You perceive, little un"—addressing Sebastian more particularly—"that I put on these bandages with the hair side out, which makes a soft cushion for the feet, and leaves no track for a pryin' Black-foot, or, what amounts to the same thing, the runagade whiteskins that have fell from the grace of their color, as 'twere, and rendered themselves fit marks for the fust honest rifle that can be brought to bear on 'em. Bad stuff," he muttered, musingly, "is white blood turned sour."

He paused in his labors; and holding a fore-foot of his horse Shagbark upon his knee, with the skin gathered upon it in folds, held by his left hand, raised his right with suggestive earnestness, as if he would appeal to every rational person's understanding, and added:

"If the p'ison newspapers had got hold of them mean skunks, instead of a simple old trapper who giner'ly minds his own business, and don't keer to have his business advertised, they'd a hit it!"

Nicholas breathed better after this remark, and, with a face upon which there was dissatisfaction, but no anger, tied a buckskin thong over the segment of buffalo skin that shielded the sharp hoof of his animal.

"They have carried you ever and ever so many miles, uncle Nick, those feet," said Sebastian.

"You may b'lieve it, Humbug," replied Nick, with deliberation.

"Yes, white boy humbug!" exclaimed Indian Joe, scornfully.

"Hullo! look out what you say there, redskin, or you'll be put under a trifle of restraint ag'in!"

At the solicitation of Pathaway, the boy-guide had been released from the ignominy of bonds—he having expressed so much faith in his integrity, that Doubledark had reluctantly yielded to his wishes.

The horses having been duly moccasined, Sebastian was placed upon one of them, which was, of course, Nick's.

"We must let the little un ride, on 'count of his arm, which is cut nighabout off; and I shouldn't wonder if mortification sets in soon. Mortification runs in the blood of the Whif fleses."

"You told me," said Pathaway, quickly, with a troubled look, "that the lad's flesh heals with remarkable readiness."

"When at rest, it does; but jest let that boy stir about more 'n common on them sparrer legs, and he'd git up the condemndest inflammation that you can 'magine. I've seen sich inflammations on that lad!"

"Let him ride, by all means; and, as his wound properly belongs to me, and should be credited to my own flesh and blood, I will walk beside him when practicable, and gi-- him particular attention during our flight, however long it may be or difficult. Poor Andrew Jeanjean can mount the animal that bore me in safety from Trapper Valley, while my youthful guide can take the othe-- We are indebted for the two to the wild girl of Trapper Trace, whose kindness I shall ever remember with gratitude."

"He can jest as well run along at the horses' heels," answered Nick, throwing a suspicious glance at Joe. "It's the natur' o' the varmint to run. Howsomnever, he'll prehaps be safer on horseback, though I shall tie him on to keep him from givin' us the slip in the dark. Portneuf, jump on to Daphnis, and lead the way toward Black Rock by the path I showed ye to-day. You're used to the wilderness, and I shall trust a good 'eal to your sharpness." Then to the gray hunter: "In regard to a young man o' your 'cuteness, I shall have little to say in the way of advice—takin' it for sartin that you know a trail from a bufferler-path, and the sign of an enemy from the scramblin' of a mountain-goat or the springy step of a deer or antelope. As for me, I shall be ahind and afore, and scoutin' about on every side; for, to tell you the truth (and it 'twont do no good to conceal it), I've seen symptoms of a p'ison diffikilty."

"We're not women and children," answered Pathaway, drily.

"No," responded the trapper, bluntly, "but we're men and boys; and sich desp'rate funny boys! One's got a condemned gash, and 'tother's got a natur in him that's agin white natur, leastwise. Climb up, Copperface!"

The last injunction was directed to Joe, who mounted with reluctance and sat awkwardly in the saddle. In spite of the remonstrances of the hunter, Nicholas secured the boy as if he were a captive taken in lawful warfare.

"Move on, Frenchman," said Doubledark. "Pathaway, you'll have an eye to the boys, while I will have eyes for you all."

Portneuf spoke to Daphnis and the parties were in motion, with the exception of Nick, who lingered, with the dogs at his side. He watched them out of sight, the muffled steps of the horses sending back no sound, and leaving a trail intelligible only to the most discerning eye. Withdrawing a short distance from the hut, he stood motionless some ten minutes, looking now at Smuggler, now at Calamity as they crouched at his feet, then at the deserted and lonely lodge.

The moon had not arisen, a deep obscurity resting upon the wilderness, calculated to inspire feelings of isolation, had Nick been disposed to indulge in such emotions. But his mind was as firm as his own steel; and he could rely upon it as well.

There was a faint stir and quiver in the grass on the opposite quarter of the camp; it subsided; the long spires ceased to move except in obedience to the wind, while Nick remained as fixed as the tree that sheltered him. There was a billowy undulation in the rank foliage again, then a tufted head lifted slowly above it, then a red face, with gleaming eyes and earnest, eager expression. "Misfortune" glanced up at his master, then at the erect, bronzed head. Nick gave him a gentle hint to be quiet with the breech of his rifle, which

he held ready for instant use. The scalp-lock of the reconnoitering savage was decorated with seven plumes, and the trapper remembered him at once as the leader of the party that had captured Jack Wiley. Presently, a second head arose from the herbage, but it had a redundancy of hair and a white face to mark its nationality.

"As I s'pected!" muttered Nick. "They've made friends with the mammon of unrighteousness. That's Bill Brace, and there's some o' the carrion crows of Hendricks not far off. I'll be sworn. They're going to fetch the Blackfeet agin us now—bought 'em up with whiskey, beads, caliker, and nick-nacks. Well, they're allies when there's deviltry afoot. Hist, dogs!"

It was a habit of Nick's, growing out of his solitary life, to speak his thoughts when alone; and on this occasion they were spoken so low that the words could scarcely be said to pass beyond his lips.

The Indian arose, and throwing forward his long, lithe body, peered into the empty hut, then entered with wary step, followed by Bill Brace. They were hidden from the trapper's view for the space of a minute, then came out with looks of disappointment, and searched for the trail of the departing prey.

"Gone! gone!" exclaimed Brace. "'Tis the work o' that meddlin' lank Nick Whiffles. What think ye, redskin?"

"Doubledark very dark; go and come like fox; eye very sharp on long gun—shoot—kill—run—no ketch him! Seven Plumes try many time take his scalp. No take his scalp!"

Nick smiled grimly and felt of his head; it still wore its natural covering.

"Try take him 'live; carry to village—build big fire—roast—burn—make him cry—tears run down like squaw. No ketch him!"

"Oh Lord, no!" thought Nick.

"Hide in woods to shoot him when go by; he no go in woods; he go on prairie, one, two, three, four mile off. No shoot him!"

"Not a bit on't!" said Nick, mentally.

"Followed his trail three days," continued Seven Plumes, with growing earnestness, "to find him 'sleep. Come upon his camp at night; dog bark like devil. No find him 'sleep!"

"It's the mercy o' God," thought Nicholas, "that he's give me wisdom enough to keep out the clutches of the heathen both by day and by night."

"One time surround his lodge with warriors and fire ten, fifteen, twenty-five time; hit nothin' but lodge. By-me-by he fire his long rifle; kill Ingin every shot. That no good! Seven Plumes and his braves go 'way very mad. 'Nother time take pale-face prisoner; start, but Doubledark hide in valley 'mong rocks; steal up to prisoner—cut him loose—pale-face git 'way—Doubledark git 'way. Ugh!"

The brow of the Blackfoot grew darker with resentment. A few twinkling stars threw a feeble light upon his dusky face. He resembled a dark picture in a dark setting, with Bill Brace and the cabin for a background.

"Can't say, Blackfoot, that I'm sorry a prisoner got away, though it seems like an injury to you. The critter was Jack Wiley, and belongs to Cap'n Dick's fellers. If you'd made an eend o' Jack, our boys would a been arter ye, and there'd been no friendship atween us; so his meddlin' that time turned out for the best."

Nick lifted the breech of his rifle a little from the leaves, and his fingers worked upon the barrel as if playing on an instrument, but a feeling, either of policy or humanity, prevented his sending the unerring bullet. He scanned his lurking and persevering enemy with an interest awakened by the revelations he had heard. Had he indeed been singled out by the tawny nomads of the wilderness as a special victim of their vengeance? Was this circumstance new to him? It was not. A wandering life, stretching over some twenty-five years, had taught him the peculiarities of savage nature; given him an insight into its wiles, artifices, and obstinate persistence in dogging the footsteps of an enemy. He had been instructed upon the dangerous trapping-grounds by sudden surprises; by forced marches and hasty flights; by chance rencontres in a hundred places, by countless contingencies incident to that kind of existence, until his sensibilities had grown sharp and his knowledge approximated to the keenness of instinct. Even his present position proved how much training had done for him; he stood

within a few yards of inveterate enemies—two, certainly, with more, doubtless, within call—one man, yet firm and confident, and conscious of his own abilities to meet emergencies.

"Seven Plumes shall have Doubledark to carry to his village," said Brace, with determination. "His skulp shall hang up in his lodge after his women and children have played with it, and paraded it about on a pole. A pooty thing it'll be, to p'int to it and say, 'That's the skulp of Nick Whiffles!'"

The trapper imagined that he could see a sinister scowl upon the Indian's forehead, which grew more malign as Brace went on.

"The great Nor'wes," resumed the latter, bitterly, "has rung long enough with the name of Doubledark. You can't go nowhere but you'll hear on him. Go up the Big Red, and they'll ask for fifty mile along its banks if you've seed him. Go down the Columby, and it's the same thing over ag'in. Take a long tramp 'cross the lakes to Montreal, and the Frenchmen'll ask, 'Are ye 'quainted with Nick Whiffles?' On the southern slope of the Rocky mountains they'll want to know what Nick Whiffles is doin', and if he's comin' down that way soon. I know this is so, both by my own experience and what I've heerd from others."

"He great warrior, great hunter, great trapper, great everything!" asserted Seven Plumes, reflectively.

"Great as he is, he's yourn. Cap'n Hendricks says you shall have him, if he's got men enough to take him, though he don't want to be known much in the business himself, for everythin' that's done here works down into the clearin's in course o' time. He's got heaps of knives, blankets, and beads for his brothers the Blackfeet. Chief, bring out your braves; let 'em swarm into every pass and valley, perarie, and bit o' timber in this stretch o' country. There's a boy and a man with him; the man," he added, depressing his voice, "b'longs to me."

"Me know!" said Seven Plumes, quickly. "You fought together like squaws. He knock Bill Brace down—strike dam hard! Make face look like squaw's face when she been beat by drunken Ingin. Wah! wah!"

Seven Plumes turned up his nose in contempt.

Bill Brace swore an oath which would not grace our pages, exhibiting his chagrin in an unmistakable manner.

"The boy," he continued, wincing, "must be taken, too. Cap'n Dick wants him, but what for, is more'n I know; he talks about him queer, 'pearin' to be afeard on him one minute, and inquisitive 'bout him the next. Does Seven-Plumes understand?"

"Ugh, ugh!"

"Then," proceeded Brace, "there's a critter, a Frenchman called Portneuf, that's got to be put one side 'fore he can snuff the air of the settlements. Don't stan' on ceremony with him, chief, but lift his hair quick's you can. He's been in the Valley, and in a halter, too, but by some kind of deviltry or nickromancy—which Nick Whiffles may be at the bottom of, for all I know—slipped out neck and heels, hoss and all. He might talk, you know. Do you hear?"

"Am I a tree or a stone?"

"You may be a c od afore you know it!" muttered Nick.

"Then I have spoke to the p'int, and we'll set ourselves to work to pick out this trail. It'll go hard with us, if Ingin cunnin' and white cunnin' can't outwit him."

"It'll go hard with me and them with me," was the conviction that forced itself upon the trapper, "if you do."

The Indian and Brace now commenced a fresh examination of the spot; while they were looking at every indentation in the earth, every wound of the tender grass, every disturbance of the leaves, with their faces close to the earth, Nick silently retreated, following with cautious strides the party in which he felt so deep an interest, not so much by the trail, which was scarcely perceptible, even to him, but from perfect familiarity with the route Portneuf had taken.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE YOUNG INDIAN MAKES A STARTLING ANNOUNCEMENT.

Pathaway and the lads, conducted by the Frenchman, passed over considerable ground before Nick overtook them. In the interim, the hunter, agreeably to his promise, had kept near Sebastian, watching his movements with

friendly zeal, ready to assist him in case of need. The youth received his attentions with a singular mixture of gratitude and timidity—the latter, that inexplicable shrinking that often rendered his character feminine. The eyes of Indian Joe frequently wandered to the parties, but with no pleased expression. The gray hunter noticed at length his persistent, and at times, anxious glances, and walked to his side, leaving Sebastian in the rear.

"Joe," he said, in a gentle manner, "I regret that one who has done me a service should be thus treated; but we are placed in a position so perilous that we are forced to use every reasonable precaution; although I confess that were it not for our friend, the trapper, I would not consent to this measure, but allow your limbs to remain free."

"Ingin boy no 'count. He guide pale-face, but no matter. White hunter no memory. Tie Joe up like dog—he no feel—he no care—his flesh no have pain!"

The boy pronounced these abrupt sentences in an aggrieved tone, and Pathaway would not have been surprised to see tears flow down his red cheeks. But his grief—if grief it were—was mingled with a spirit that would occasionally flash up wild and fervent. Not knowing how to soothe a nature like his, Pathaway kept pace with the slow movements of his horse in silence, waiting for a different mood to come over him to render him more placable.

"Why you walk 'side Joe? Joe no white. Go walk 'longside squaw!" The young Indian threw a scornful look backward at Sebastian.

"What did you say, Joe?" asked the hunter, glancing inquiringly at his features.

"Go walk with squaw—talk with squaw, and no mind Ingin Joe, who save your life!"

"You call him a squaw," answered Pathaway musing "but the term of reproach is unmerited. I know he is very contradictory in his behavior, but I do believe that he is not wanting in courage, as that wound upon his arm attests."

"How?" asked Joe, eagerly, as if thrown off his guard.

"He bravely interposed that member between my own person and the knife of an assassin—a burly ruffian called Bill Brace, whom it was once my privilege to punish for his insolence."

"Bill Brace!" repeated Joe, with a slight start.

"Yes, Bill Brace; one of the creatures of the man Hendricks. I might have been sleeping soundly beneath the green turf of the wilderness, had it not been for Sebastian Delaunay. Even the wandering red man knows how to repay gratitude, and bears ever in his breast, as a sacred deposit, the remembrance of a favor."

"Has no one else saved the life of the pale-face hunter?" Joe demanded sharply, almost angrily.

"Yes, Carlota—the strange girl Carlota!" responded Pathaway, sighing. "She might have been lovely in character as in person; but now, alas! she is Beauty run wild!" Then he added, "And wicked, too."

"She saved life, but you no like her. That not the way Ingin does; he no forget when friend come, take him by the hand and say 'you free; here hoss with saddle, bridle, and here Ingin boy, that no betray you.'"

"Do those cords hurt your wrists?" Pathaway asked, after an embarrassing silence.

"They cut into the flesh, but Joe no complain. He git pay that way for what he done."

"I'll hazard the risk of freeing your hands, at any rate," said Pathaway, touched with remorse, and immediately cut the boy's bonds with his knife. "I will trust you; see that my confidence is not abused."

"Joe no make promise; he do what he please, but no make promise. He tell pale-face, though, that that boy no boy; he squaw—he woman!"

The blood flushed up to Pathaway's brow. "Joe tell truth; he no lie—that boy, woman!"

For some reason Pathaway did not immediately answer. Perhaps he was comparing the young Indian's startling assertion with his own thoughts, and evidences gathered from a thousand trifling circumstances. He partially turned and threw an earnest look at Sebastian Delaunay; the youth's face appeared more beautiful than ever. His large, dreamy eyes beamed with softer light, while his wondrous symmetry of person shaped itself into a form of additional grace. The little hand, the di-

mutive foot and daintily turned ankle, had new meaning for Pathaway. He recalled the occasion of the dressing of the wounded arm, and the vague, and then almost improbable suspicion that had floated dimly and distantly across the horizon of his mind, yet with sufficient vividness to give him a strange thrill. For a moment he forgot everything but the one absorbing conviction that Indian Joe had forced upon him.

"He's a tender plant—a delicate half-breed, I allow, but certainly, Joe, you have started an improbable conjecture," he said, presently.

"Pale-face wise, but he no deceive Joe. He feel all the time, boy, woman; white man's heart tell him boy, woman; but he no want to believe what it say; so he go on like one in dream, now satisfied, now not; now no care, now care much."

Joe's penetrating eyes looked at Pathaway as if to read the obscurest page of his heart. In truth, the gray hunter was visibly agitated, and Carlota and the banditti of Trapper Valley were swept from his consciousness. Had Joe indeed made a disclosure? If the person in question were indeed a woman, what was her history, and why was she wandering like a damsel errant in the Northern wilds?

"Her eyes were like soft star-beams gleaming
At midnight on the sleeping water;
Her face was ever on me beaming,
I loved the wandering trapper's daughter.
Oh, the trapper's daughter!"

The voice of Andrew Jeanjean was lifted mournfully upon the night air, and borne away over bush and brake and waving grass. At that instant Nick overtook them.

"That's ruther good music," he said, "but it hasn't power to soothe the savage breast hereabouts. Andrew, lad, don't sing no more at present, for there are heathen ears that may catch the sound, and we've wore our skulps so long that we should be loth to part with 'em for a song; though a good many things has been sold for a song, I've heerd."

Then to Sebastian:

"Are you 'sleep, Sparrer-Legs? How's that p'ison gash o' your'n? 'Tisn't a good thing to get cold in. Have knowed a condemned diffikilty to come of a smaller cut nor that. Are ye comfortable, little 'un?"

Pathaway's handsome face turned wonderingly, admiringly upon Nick Whiffles. He thought he knew, now, the meaning of all his care of Sebastian; his womanly tenderness of him; his constant solicitude for his safety; his thousand attentions; his countless artifices to shield him from distrust; his unfailing, never-tiring kindness; his gentle delicacy; his immeasurable friendship. Here was a mystery! And into this mystery Pathaway passed with all his being. He no longer felt indifference respecting the dangers that surrounded them. Here was an object thrown upon his care that gave an interest to flight and defence. The romance of woman was upon the wilderness. The charm of her innocence, hopelessness, and beauty gave new incentive to effort, and converted the wide-stretching North into an arena where lances might be broken and gallant deeds performed. Already he was conscious of that enchantment that ever waits upon the presence, and lives in the voice and smiles of that softer sex to which all men, sooner or later, yield homage. He felt his manhood revive, and began to take an active interest in their nocturnal flight.

By this time they had reached a spot where the *cul-de-sac*, or blind alley, leading to the basin which had received the name of Black Rock, on account of the towering masses of dark rock that hemmed it in. Nick Whiffles had reason to remember the place; he had not only lost traps there in an unexplainable manner, but had witnessed, in addition, that terrible drama described in the first chapter of our tale.

Pathaway observed that Sebastian shivered the moment his shadow fell within the narrow portal. Nick was at the lad's side in an instant, speaking, in a low voice, words of encouragement.

"Under ordinary circumstances, this spot would be safe," said Nick, presently, "but as things is, we can't rely entirely on its security; for the red heathen are leagued with our enemies, and we may expect to hear from 'em afore the world is much older. Howsomnever, three good rifles in practiced hands, is a mortal terror to the nat'ral varmints of the sile; so be lively, lad, and don't be cast down with misgivin's or the pain of your little diffikilty."

"I'm not afraid, uncle Nick," replied Sebastian.

"Not a bit on't! not a bit on't! Should like to hear somebody say that you're afeard, or that you're capable o' bein' skeer'd in any manner," answered Nick, heartily.

A low, disdainful laugh came from the direction of Indian Joe; but when the trapper looked at him sharply, he appeared as sullen and absent as ever.

"Ingin boys git big enough to skulp when they're about 'leven year old!" observed Nick, contracting his brow till there was a vertical wrinkle on the line of, and parallel with his nose.

Whether Joe understood this remark as having any application to himself, is problematical. A smile lingered an instant on the pale lips of Sebastian, but which suddenly faded as they emerged from the winding alley into the basin.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BLACK RUN.

The irregular rampart of rock that gave name to the spot, towered around the parties in dim and shadowy outline, resembling a rough and gigantic wall built by some extinct race of giants, the uniformity of which work was marred by the busy and wasting touch of Time. The dark stream upon which Nick had bestowed the appellation of Black Run, lay before them like a surface of ebony.

Sebastian pressed closely to Nicholas; there was a perceptible wildness in his manner, while his face was strikingly pallid, considering the mixture of his blood. The gray hunter purposely placed himself near the youth, and observing signs of his besetting weakness upon him, remarked to the trapper:

"Our young friend has the chills again."

"Not the chills, not the chills," said Nick, but the animosity of his wound. It gives him a deal o' pain, but tein' of Ingin natur, in part, leastwise, he's too proud to complain. You've no idee how much torment he can stan'! I r'ally b'lieve that he could have a double tooth distracted by a Selkirk doctor 'thout wincin'; and that's sayin' a good 'eal for his fortitude, for the teeth of the Whiffleses come mighty hard. They tried to pull one for me, the doctors did, but they aimed their money, by gracious! Arter they'd broke sev'ral instruments and made my mouth a gorge o' blood, I told 'em, 'Hold on,' sez I, and they's right glad to leave go.

"'Bring a lariat,' sez I. The lariat was brung.

"'Put a runnin' noose round the grinder,' sez I, and they did it.

"'Make t'other eend fast to a tree,' sez I, and they beyed the order. When this was done, taking a pistol in each hand, I sez to 'em: 'Seize me by the heels!' sez I, and by the heels they seized me. 'Now pull,' sez I, 'and the fust man as lets go afore the tooth's out, I'll shoot!' sez I. Then there was some pullin' and tuggin' for 'bout fifteen minutes or up'ards, and the perspiration rolled off 'em like rain from the ruff of a house in a shower. It hurt like p'ison! I thought to gracious every bone in my sylum was comin' out; but I'd had the jumpin' toothache goin' on two months and was worked up to a desprit pitch. 'What's the use,' thought I, 'of havin' bones if there's to be a consarned diffikilty in 'em all the time? Might's well have no bones, as to have rotten ones. Some animiles,' I reasoned, 'don't have no bones. There's snakes, for instance, don't have none to brag on, and they squirm about and git over the ground like lightnin'; and I'm equal to a snake, anyday.' And with that I menaced 'em with my weepens, and the grinder came out spiteful, with a noise as loud as the crack of a rifle."

Nick paused, then added, shaking his head: "I'll never have no more pulled, for it shocked my skileton terrible; and took out a good bit o' the narvous system; for the grinders, you know, are set right into the narvous system."

Pathaway was not backward to perceive the tact of the trapper in leading his mind from the youth, and to divert the thoughts of the latter to a subject more agreeable than that which manifestly disturbed him.

"Does your wound indeed give you so much pain?" Pathaway asked, in a voice modulated more softly than usual; for since the strange declaration of Indian Joe, he had felt a strong desire to hear Sebastian converse. His tones, always clear and low, were now to him more

melodious, and he listened to them with rapt attention.

"You distress yourself on my account too much," he said, with a strong attempt at cheerfulness. "Uncle Nick, I believe, has spoiled me by too much petting. If he had subjected me to more hardship, been less careful of my comfort, and more desirous of my reputation as a hunter, my person would have been seasoned to the hardships of the life to which I was born."

"Nonsense!" interrupted Nick, "I know what you're capable of better nor you do. You can travel, and suffer, and starve with the best of us, on a pinch; and not on pinch, neither, but at the shortest notice."

"Can he trap?" Pathaway inquired, mechanically.

"'Twould do you good to see him trap!" answered Nick, with unction. He'll put that foot o' his'n on the spring of a trap in a way you don't think of. Click! and down it goes, and his fingers work into the jaws of the trap, break 'em down, and fix the trencher surprisin'! He knows jest where to place the thing, too, and how to conceal it in the grass. 'Twould 'stonish ye to see the fur the lad's ketched, fust and last. He follers up the streams as if by instinc' and not by larnin'."

"He's a good shot, doubtless?" continued the hunter, interested in the honest zeal of the trapper.

"He shoots beyend everythin'! Set up a mark of some bigness a little ways off for that boy to hit, and you'll see p'int's o' character that you don't mistrust. He had a small rifle of his own—a nice one, that I paid a hundred dollars for if I paid a cent, but 'twas stole from him when his hoss was stole. I told you that some thievish critter took his animile, didn't I? I's sorry for the loss, 'cause it come of a good breed, and in size was about of a muchness with Sparrer-Legs."

Sebastian, who had been walking unsteadily, tottered, and would have fallen had it not been for the friendly interposition of Pathaway, who caught him in his arms, and in the haste of doing so, grasped him by his wounded arm. The pain produced by the action probably served to recover him; deep flush came to his cheeks, but no exclamation of suffering passed his lips. While the gray hunter supported him, Nick ran to the stream and brought water in his cap, which grateful liquid he sprinkled upon his face.

The hunter, holding the hand of the injured member 'n his, felt something warm upon his own, and perceived with alarm that it was stained with crimson drops. His sudden grasp had loosened the bandages and started the bleeding afresh. Nicholas detected the circumstance at the same time, and appeared for a moment embarrassed. But it was for an instant, only, that he was nonplussed; bringing from some mysterious pocket a yellow bandanna of long service, by no means above suspicion in the matter of cleanliness, he bound it about Sebastian's arm outside the sleeve of his frock.

Pathaway expressed dissatisfaction at this impromptu surgery, but was gravely assured that he had acted according to universal custom in the Northwest. Sebastian was unconscious but a few seconds, and glanced timidly at Nick when he recovered, as if fearful of being censured for his weakness.

"Forgive me, uncle Nick!" he murmured.

"Not a tall!" answered Nick.

"You are angry!" said the lad, much troubled. "I have gone beyond your patience."

"The Lord love ye, no! It's that condemned diffikilty that makes you so shaky in the j'int's."

The trapper looked at the rocks and remembered the torches that had once flashed across their rough sides and gleamed down on the water. His countenance grew serious.

"Necessity," he said, addressing Sebastian, "brings us here; but it's a necessity that shan't last long if I can help it. I understand you observe, what natur is, and how some folks feel under sartin circumstances. This is but a temporary hidin'-place; a spot where we stop to breathe, as 'twere, and where we'll leave the hosses, prehaps. We're hunted, and it's needful that I should watch the enemy. Seven-Plumes, the chief of the Black-feet, is a renowned warrior that has an on-pleasant hankerin' for my hair; and if there's a varmint cunning enough to lift it, he's the one, though I shall throw as many diffikilties in his way as possible; for a man'll part with e'equamost anythin' else more cheerfuller nor

he will with his skulp. I can play at the game of low cunnin' as well as another; but I'll be skinned if it's in me to take the top-knot of a dead enemy, though I've knowd white folks as would do it. Colonel, stay here and look arter this boy; and not too much, neither; for you'll make him bleed ag'in if you stare at him as you do sometimes. Here's the Ingin, too, who must be 'tended to, for my confidence in him is shook. The heathen chief is sharp at a trail, and may be closer than is safe. Come, Frenchman, go with me; for I recollect that you used to be no fool in matters o' the woods and red-skins."

"But why not take me for your companion?" said Pathaway, somewhat piqued.

"To be frank, because you are the stronger of the two, and rayther the quickest with your eyes and rifle, prehaps; and you're in duty bound to stick to the boy that was willin' to risk his own life for your'n."

Without waiting to hear further remonstrance, Nick glided away, followed by Portneuf.

The gloom of the night perceptibly lightened, the clouds lifting and the moon appearing dimly, affording Pathaway a tolerable view of surrounding objects. The jagged outlines of the rocks, separated from, and seemed to rise out of the darkness, defining their rude strength with a boldness that was striking.

"Behold," said the hunter, sweeping the basin with his finger, "the more massive and cumbrous workmanship of Nature! How grand and stern she is in a scene like this!"

"I see no sublimity in towering rocks and bold crags; at least, not here," answered Sebastian, averting his eyes after a hurried glance at the points indicated. "I confess that a chilling awe creeps over me."

"That comes of the force of association," returned Pathaway. "You have in your remembrance the tale frequently alluded to by our friend, the trapper. Many places, grand and interesting naturally, become terrible by circumstances; a spot where a murder has been committed, for instance. Cast your eyes across that dark sheet of water and observe how those stony peaks are graduated, one rising above another as they recede from the basin. We have only to have lights and figures moving from crag to crag, to finish a wild and romantic picture."

Sebastian looked up at the hunter to see if he meant more than his words implied; but his was not a countenance easily read; it was always calm and thoughtful, save when fired up by wrong or danger, when his mouth grew firmer in its significance, and his eyes beamed with courage and determination.

"That stream is to me black and fearful!" Sebastian answered, "and the riven rocks, the looming ledges, and the pointed peaks are weird and threatening."

The youth made a gesture toward the objects spoken of as he severally mentioned them. The gray hunter did not respond to this remark, keeping his eyes fixed upon the beetling rocks.

"I am almost certain," he said anon, "that I saw a human figure on yonder bluff."

"It cannot be; it was but a creation of fancy," Sebastian replied, with a shudder.

"I know that the eye is easily deceived, especially at night, in a spot where the imagination has free scope to roam."

He stopped, then exclaimed:

"It was no deception! There it is again! Now it is out of sight."

"A mountain goat, perhaps; the spot does not appear accessible to men," said the youth.

"You are mistaken. If my judgment does not err, that is the very place where the outlaws entered the basin, bearing their helpless and lovely victim. What a scene it must have been, as they defiled into the valley, and stood by the stream, the torches gleaming in the foreground, the woman kneeling with outstretched hands, and in the back-ground, grouped together, the accomplices of the act. What powerful motives could have led to the perpetration of such a deed?"

"The bad passions of men," Sebastian replied, in a voice scarcely articulate, while the dark face of Indian Joe was thrust forward to drink in every word with an inquisitive interest that was unusual for one of his race to exhibit.

"There is a Power that often thwarts the base purposes of man, which was strikingly displayed in this instance. Nick informs me,"

he added, regarding Sebastian steadily, "that the woman was beautiful. As you have been with the trapper a long time, you doubtless saw her. Was she then so handsome, good youth?"

Sebastian hesitated, while a faint color stole to his cheeks.

Indian Joe's dark orbs were leveled at the boy with all their deep and mysterious intensity.

"I saw her," he said, stammering, "and though many were pleased to think her beautiful, I did not fall in love with her face."

"Her figure?" queried Pathaway.

"Being but a boy, I am no judge of such matters," added Sebastian, with affected playfulness. "I never heard any one fault her form. She certainly had no reason to complain of the gifts of Nature."

Joe's brow now knitted into a frown, and the long, delicate lashes that fringed his eyes quivered with some secret emotion.

"I am talking while I should be acting," said Pathaway. "It will not be well to allow an enemy to surprise one who is no novice in woodcraft. I must reconnoitre yonder rocks."

The hunter paused, and looked toward Joe, as if at a loss to know what disposition to make of him.

"Go with you," he said, comprehending the glance with that quickness which was characteristic of him.

"No, you must stay with—with Sebastian."

The youth had regarded the gray hunter more than once with a singular admixture of doubt, curiosity, and alarm. It seemed to him that the tones of the man's voice had changed—that they were more respectful and gentle. Deference was what he had never before shown him, however kind and friendly his manner.

"I will return in a moment," said the hunter, and had walked several yards toward the stream, when the report of a carbine disturbed the silence of the basin. Pathaway staggered and fell. Sebastian sprang to his side, and either through terror, the weakness incident to his wound, or both combined, sank insensible to the ground.

Pathaway immediately arose, and perceiving what had happened to the youth, caught him in his arms and hurried to a spot more sheltered from the aim of an enemy. As he hastened forward, he looked furtively over his shoulder and saw a little cloud of smoke rising from the crag where he had seen the figure.

"He is dead! they have killed him!" murmured Sebastian, almost indistinctly, as he slowly recovered.

"No! he lives; he is with you!" said Pathaway.

The lad opened his eyes with a bewildered air, and seeing himself supported by the hunter, gently disengaged himself.

"I heard a report and thought you had fallen. It could not have been fancy," Sebastian added, not yet quite certain what had happened.

"I was struck by a spent ball, but am uninjured."

"This wound, I believe, makes a child of me," replied Sebastian, with a forced smile. "My flesh, evidently, does not heal so readily as represented by Nick."

"I have observed you attentively, my lad, and am sure that you have suffered much. Your hands," he continued, taking the youth's in his, "are feverish. You have not complained enough."

The boy Joe tossed his head and dilated his nostrils with unequivocal contempt.

"Blood mixed!" he muttered. "Weak—faint like squaw—child! Young Ingin go on trail; git bullet, git arrow—almost kill—no cry!" Then pointing at Sebastian: "He better put on gown like white woman."

"Be silent, boy!" said Pathaway, with a rebuking glance. "If your warriors do not complain of wounds, neither do they talk much. The young men and youths who have never been on the war-path keep mute tongues in the presence of their superiors."

Joe turned his back moodily to Pathaway, but did not cease to cast occasionally disdainful looks at Sebastian, and there might have been in them a portion of hatred. The heightened color of the lad told how keenly he felt the taunts of Joe. Spurred perhaps by his derision, possibly because his injury gave him less pain, he arose and declared himself entirely recovered from his recent ill feelings, which he attributed partly to loss of blood, partly to the sudden shock of seeing Pathaway pro-

trated by the aim of a lurking foe.

"I'm sorry," he said, with a singular display of spirit, "that my rifle was stolen; for according to present appearances, I shall have occasion to use it; and I tell you, Colonel, I can shoot quite well. You doubt it, I see, but I will convince you at the first opportunity that offers."

"No Ingin—no had white man come; you kill 'em quick!" said Joe, looking at Sebastian's bow and quiver, which had fallen upon the ground a few yards distant.

"The bow and arrow," said Pathaway, coming to the rescue, "are instruments not to be despised. Your own people, tawny Joe, have used them with great effect. I'm not disposed to slight the claims of the bow, which was one of the primitive weapons of mankind, in vogue long before the rifle and powder were dreamed of."

"Joe," observed Sebastian, "is in ill temper. He is little pleased with the severity of Nick, but his limbs being now free, I see no reason that he should murmur."

The young Indian deigned no reply.

Nick and Portneuf were heard approaching.

"Who fired?" asked the former, quickly.

"Some one hidden among yonder cliffs," Pathaway replied.

"Nobody hurt, I hope? We shall have enough to 'tend to 'thout lookin' arter gunshot wounds."

"A spent ball struck me upon the side, or rather upon the metallic handle of my hunting-knife, doing no other harm than prostrating me by the shock."

"That's fortinit! We can't afford to lose man nor boy at present. The critters, I believe, haven't diskivered the natril way to Black Run; but it 'pears they're comin' down the rocks yonder, for it couldn't been a chance shot that struck you. Dick Hendricks is in airnest, and his new allies, the red niggers, are up and stirrin'. I should like to draw a bead on some on 'em, by mighty! There'll be warm work, but I'm sartin you'll stan' by like a man. Whatever happens, if you live through it, I want you to keep a still tongue in your head, and not let the pison newspapers git held on't. What's the use o' bein' held up afore the public, and turned over and over like a brile? I swear to gracious," added Nick, taking an old cap from the tube of his rifle and replacing it by another, "if the pesky clearin's wasn't so far off, I'd go down with a load o' peltries, and buy up half a dozen of the condemned con-emns!"

"I think no one has spoken ill of you in the clearings," said Pathaway.

"I've lived 'cordin to my natur, and why should a person be spoke ill of that's lived 'cordin to his natur? I never cheated nobody of what b'longed to him, nor sold peltry that wasn't legally mine, nor shot a bufferler out o' wantonness, nor deserted a brother trapper in need, nor drew back when there was danger, or rubbed out a heathen red-skin when self-preservation didn't demand it."

"Few of your brethren of the gun and trap can say as much," Pathaway replied.

By tacit consent, the two men walked a few yards from the rest of the parties.

"You saw no signs of pursuers near the cul-de-sac?" said Pathaway, interrogatively.

"Don't talk French, colonel, if you want to git information out o' me, for I never could talk much with the Monsheers; though I've picked up a few words here and there from the French voyageurs. Howsomnever, to come to the pint, I diskivered nothin' to excite suspicion that they'd found the entrance to Black Run. But as Seven-Plumes, Bill Brace, Hendricks and his crew are on our trail, we can't expect to remain long undisturbed. If there wasn't but one Ingin in the business, we could hope to outwit 'em with less trouble; but they've got their orders to swarm into every hidin'-place, pass, valley, gulch, perarie, and timber in the whole o' this region."

While Nicholas was speaking, Pathaway was thinking of Sebastian. At one moment he was tempted to tell frankly his suspicions concerning the sex of the youth; but, he inwardly queried, would it be kind to refer to a subject which Nick took so much pains to conceal? Again there was a possibility of mistake. The assertion of Indian Joe might be false; and yet that could scarcely be, for there were innumerable little circumstances to confirm it. He resolved that he would be silent, at least for the present, well assured that Sebastian was not what his garb would indicate.

"The lives of those with us and our own being at stake, how shall we escape the toils of our enemies?" Pathaway asked.

"I thought," answered Nick, "pervidin' we reached this place, we should be safe; but you observe that human calculations isn't allers to be depended on. A nice hidin' spot is this under common circumstances; but as luck'll have it, Hendricks knows the way down yonder rocks. Turn your eyes to that crag that stands out so square and bold. Well, 'twas on that that I see the two men, Hendricks and Bill Brace, appear with their torches on a sartin night that I've mentioned afore. I remember how they looked wavin' 'em, to make the glare fall upon the basin and on the surroundin' rocks. He wore a red sash, Cap'n Dick did. Arter stannin' there a minute, grim and onnat'ral, as 'twere, they vanished from sight, to start up ag'in presently, more to the right, where you see the peaks gradooated one above another, like stairs. They toiled down slow and keeful, did Brace and Hendricks, with the four ruffians ahind 'em bringin' the lovely gal. I can very well recollect how the torches sunk and rose ag'in, as they wound down the rough way."

"I would like to know," said Pathaway, earnestly, "what became of that woman?"

"I'm wanderin' from my subjeck," answered Nick, hurriedly. "You want to know what shall we do? I'll give ye my 'pinion, then I'll hear your'n. Bear in mind, colonel, that you've been fired at, which couldn't happened if you hadn't been seen. Well, that's a dis-kivery, I allow, so that we're no longer hid, but found. Now, what can we do, hemmed up in this little pocket, with Ingins and whites prowlin' in the rocks all round us?"

"And I might ask, too, what we shall do in the open country with the whole pack on our trail?"

"We can't trust to speed," said Nick, slowly. "No, no; speed won't do; we must put eunnin' ag'in eunnin'. If our enemies are wise as serpents, we must be wiser. We must blind their eyes."

"Were you and I alone interested in this matter, we should have little to fear; but there are other lives, Nicholas—Sebastian and poor Andrew Jeanjean."

Nick was in the act of replying, when a figure emerged from the narrow pass and approached them. It was Multnomah, the Shoshoné chief. His countenance was grave, his manner dignified.

"Has Doubledark forgotten the words of the Shoshoné?" he asked. "Does he scorn to go where the birds build their nests?"

"I come here, Ingins, because I thought the place little known to white or red-skin, and would be a good spot to leave the horses, leastwise. The words of Multnomah are not like the wind that blows on unheeded; they're laid up here." Nick touched his head.

"Seven-Plumes has told his young men, his women and children, that there will be a scalp-lance at his village before many days. The Blackfeet boys are gathering sticks to light many fires."

"Let 'em gather 'em!" retorted Nick, contracting his brows. "They'd better put 'em under kiver to keep 'em dry; for it'll be long, in my 'pinion, afore they use 'em on flesh o' mine. The Master of Life didn't make me for fire-wood; if he had, I should been drier and more combustible. As for the matter o' skulp, mine was made to be carried on my head, and not on a pole; leastwise, not on sich a pole as the varmints parade their trophies on. I don't feel consarned for myself; for I know that both savage and civilized fear this long bit o' iron which can carry death a hundred rods. I've p'inted it many and many a time, and it never let out its fire and smoke for nothin'; when it's voice was heerd, I know'd where to look for the bullet. It hasn't made all its speeches yet; there's them not fur off as it must reason with and talk to in its own 'riginal way."

"The name of Doubledark is feared by his enemies," replied Multnomah. "But look at the rattlesnake, who carries poison in his head, and is terrible when he bites; where is his power when he is beset by the ants; he writhes and darts his tongue in vain; his enemies are so many that he cannot contend with them, and dies in agony. A cloud hangs over Black Rock; before morning it will gather to a tempest call your people and fly."

The Shoshoné spoke earnestly, almost authoritatively.

"Yes, I'd made up my mind for that, Ingins,

and was proposin' it to the colonel when you come. I shall count on you, and I trust you won't desert us, for we need your quick eye and your true rifle. The horses must be left; they'll be as safe here as anywhere. What could the poor animals do where we're goin'? Nothin'; they'd be a bother to us and no good to themselves; for pasturage is mighty scarce, I allow, up thereaway." Nick pointed to the North, then joined Sebastian and those that were with him.

This conversation took place on the east side of the basin, and so far within the shadow of the inaccessible wall, that persons occupying the cliffs at the west would have been gifted with unusual sharpness of eyesight to see them. Multnomah awaited the return of the trapper silently; and when he came, moved noiselessly toward the *cul-de-sac*, and was followed without questioning. They had walked but a short distance, when Pathaway recollected that his hunting-knife had slipped from its sheath while he was talking with Nick; he went back to recover it. As he stooped to take it from the ground, he saw a narrow niche in the wall of the rock, in which lay a small package. Curiosity impelled him to take it, it was a beaver-skin wrapped carefully about something. He unrolled it; the wrapper contained, much to his surprise, the long, dark, shining tresses of a woman's hair. Holding up the silky threads to the faint moonlight, he examined them with mute eagerness, but not without many internal queries. Upon what head grew those wavy locks? What hand severed and deposited them there? Did this strange waif pertain to the old mystery of Black Run, or was it a memento of some later tragedy? It seemed to him that he had seen tresses as soft and glossy. His lips moved; he murmured something—it might have been a name.

Hearing a footstep, he thrust the hair beneath his frock; and turning, with a start, beheld Nick Whiffles; he was embarrassed, and the hunter thought annoyed; the latter met his steady look with suddenly-heightened color, as if detected in an act that might be construed into weakness. Neither spoke immediately. Nick was the first to break silence.

"I didn't know it was the natur of a white man to take skulps," he said, with manifest disturbance. "I allowed, colonel, that you had a dispersion above cruelty; and not cruelty, neither, but trifles, as 'twere. Give it to me."

The trapper hesitatingly extended his hand. "You yourself do not appear to be entirely regardless of trifles," answered Pathaway, smiling.

"It's mine," added Nick, gravely. "It 'twas a young gal's, 'twould be diff'rent; but bein', as I said, mine—"

"Yours!" interrupted Pathaway. "Come, Nicholas, it's absurd to say that locks like these grew on that weather-beaten head of yours!"

"'Twas a good many years ago, when I's a boy. You see colonel, my hair was long's a woman's then, and softer nor sewing-silk."

Nick did not raise his eyes to meet the regards of the hunter, but kept them persistently averted.

"Your curls have faded since that time!" returned the latter, laughingly. "They are almost yellow now, and each individual hair has remarkably increased in diameter."

"It's mine, not stannin', and not mine, neither, but my sweetheart's. Member well enough when she cut 'em off. 'Molly,' sez I, 'give me a lock o' your hair,' sez I. And with that I gave her one o' those meanin' looks that was my natur when I's younger, and which thawed her amazin'. 'You may have 'em all,' sez she, sighin' as gentle as a nussin' dove. With that she took a pair of sheers—no, 'twasn't a pair sheers, neither." He paused and stimulated his memory by the friction of five digits upon his head, as if accuracy was of the first importance. "Oh Lord! no. 'Twas a knife she whipped it off with. 'Twas a little more nor I wanted for present use, but I know'd 'twould keep, so I wrapped it in a beaver-skin, and arter carryin' it some years, tucked it into that niche for safe keepin'; and if you hain't no objections, scarcely, I'll trouble ye for't."

Nick reached forth his hand again, but without trusting his eyes to encounter those of his friend.

"I'll give you a trusty hand, Nicholas, and that's far better than a package of girl's hair." Pathaway grasped the extended member,

and shook it cordially.

"Your ingenuous face, Nick Whiffles, tells the truth when your ingenious tongue tells a lie. Give it up at once, my friend. Confess that this is a memento of the torch-light tragedy?"

"Pshaw! why should I care about a wisp of roman's hair? It's no more to me nor so much straw! Keep it, colonel, if you're so minded, and wear it next your heart. 'Twas a squaw it come off of, and a right jaunty critter she was, on'y her mouth was a couple o' sizes too large, her nose rather flat, and her finger squat and dumpy. But the ribbons, red stuff, beads and brooches that she used to wear, was costly in the extreme."

"No doubt! no doubt!" answered Pathaway, dryly. And the two, by mutual consent, hastened to rejoin those they had left.

CHAPTER XXV.

FLIGHT AND PURSUIT.

The parties issued from the narrow pass. Nick and the Shoshoné whispered together, then the latter crept away, and was gone some time. He came back and conferred earnestly with the trapper in the language of his people.

"The chief says," said Nick, interpreting to Pathaway, "that the Blackfeet are round us, movin' this way and that, smellin' arter our trail like dogs. To escape, we shall need eye and ear, a quick hand, a cautious foot, and silence. Portneuf, keep near Andrew Jeanjean, and see that he don't sing, and that he walks as the rest of us do. The critter's docile, and easily controlled. Colonel, look out for Indian Joe, for I observe that he's more sulky nor common."

The Shoshoné bent his tall figure, and moved toward the west, the parties treading in his footsteps. They passed over ground broken and volcanic, now surmounting rocks and crossing chasms, now winding to the right, now to the left, now stealing along the brink of precipitous crags, and finally descending by an abrupt slope to a sparsely-timbered valley. All this was not effected without painstaking and several alarms; nor was the distance, when accomplished, long. The murmuring of water was heard, and Multnomah stopped beside a running stream.

"Hist!" said Nick.

The parties became as motionless as trees.

"It is a squirrel runnin' over the leaves," said Nick, in answer to a questioning glance from Sebastian.

"I hear nothing," said the boy.

"Your young ears are not like mine," he replied.

"What is it?" asked Sebastian, anxiously.

"The leaves rustlin'; but whose afeard of the rustlin' o' leaves?" Then to Multnomah, in the same suppressed tones, "Ingins, stay here!"

Nick glided away with his long rifle at a trail. Sebastian watched him with nervous eyes, and saw him stoop lower and lower as he receded. The darkness finally shut him from view. Each listened breathlessly for the sound of his footsteps, but they sent back no tell-tale echo. The Shoshoné had stretched himself upon the earth, and was lying with his ear to the ground, giving as little sign of vitality as if life had departed. All waited in expectation, but of what they scarcely knew. Presently there was a bound like the spring of a panther, then a commotion among the leaves, as of persons struggling. But this was of short continuance; the disturbance was quickly over, and Nick shortly stood before them. He nodded to the Indian, who gave a peculiar appreciative sound from the depths of his chest.

"O Uncle Nick!" gasped Sebastian.

"It couldn't be helped, little 'un, and one from the war-path will never be missed where there's so many. The voice of the rifle couldn't be trusted hereabouts; it speaks too loud for safety."

At that moment, an object floated down the stream; every eye was riveted upon it. Part of a red face, some feathers, and a tufted scalp-lock, were for a brief time visible.

"One diffikilty the less!" said Nick, quietly.

"He was a foolish young warrior, to follow Doubledark," said the Shoshoné. "His eyes were blinded, or he'd known the trail of Doubledark is a long trail."

"You're right, Ingins; thus far, my trail has been long for them as looked for me to my hurt. 'Twould been short enough if the heathen had had their way; but I've an eye

and an ear for 'em that shortens their days. 'Tisn't because I seek 'em that sich things happen. 'Tisn't my natur to hurt nobody, but the Master o' Life says to every one plainly enough: 'Take care o' yourself!' Now if I didn't take care myself, who'd take care on me?"

While Nick was speaking, the Shoshoné dragged a large canoe from the bushes, and launched it upon the stream.

"Get in—get in!" said Nick. "Go fust, Sebastian, and you next, little Ingin. That's it! Mind what you do, Jeanjean, or you'll tip the frail consarn over. You're the boy for a paddle, Portneuf; you used to drive a canoe right smart. That hangin' affair hasn't strengthened your arms any, I take it. Pathaway, you'd better set in the middle, with your rifle poaty consider'ble convenient. Sparrer-Legs, don't shiver as if you s'pected a cold shower-bath, for the thing won't tip if you keep quiet. A ship o' the line isn't safer nor an Ingin bark well managed."

The dogs, which, in obedience to the command of their master, had crouched beside Sebastian, now stood on shore, looking wishfully at Nick.

"Let the animiles get in," said the latter. "There's room enough, and they'll make too much noise runnin' along the bank if we don't give 'em a chance with us. I never desert my dogs, Calamity, leas'twise. He's been true to me, and I'll be the same to him. Once, when there was a cussed little diffikilty with the Ingins, and he was sick, and his legs was weak, I took him up and carried him in my arms. Many and many a step has them legs took for me; miles and miles have they trotted ahind me, my companions and my friends when there's nobody to speak to. I'd thank ye," added Nick, unconsciously raising his voice, addressing Pathaway, if any one in particular, "jest to take a pint blank look at them eyes; they a'n't blue nor black, nor like a woman's lookers; but they're mighty good dog's eyes, and have a heap of understandin' in 'em."

Calamity's grizzly eyes twinkled inquiringly. There certainly were interrogation points in them.

"I don't say that his'n's a handsome head, but it's a honest one. He does snap 'casionally at Smuggler, and snubs him when he's too familiar, as 'twere; and he will bite your legs if you tread on him; but he's got qualities that put him on a footin' with many varmints that go on two feet instead o' four."

The dogs sprang into the little vessel, and the chief, taking his place in the stern, sent it into the middle of the stream with a stroke of his paddle. Portneuf aided his efforts, and the canoe shot onward like an arrow.

Trees fringed the bank, and, casting their branches over the water, were mirrored duskily upon its surface. As the paddles sank and rose, noiselessly, Nick, reclining in the bow of the birchen craft, with his rifle thrown forward across his arm, watched the coverts and the vistas on either side.

Sebastian began to feel a sense of security, which Pathaway noticed with satisfaction, and was turning to express his thanks to Multnomah, when the war-cry of a Blackfoot broke the silence with a sharp and explosive dissonance. The paddles of the Shoshoné and the voyageur simultaneously backed water. The rifle of Nick Whiffles seemed to spring to his cheek by instinct, rather than to be placed there by his usually deliberate hands. The canoe vibrated and quivered on the stream, so abruptly was its momentum checked. The long barrel had become fixed, and hurled forth its unerring messenger before a word was spoken, or ere the quick eyes of Sebastian had discovered the object of his aim. The leaves stirred overhead and the rocks rang back the echo. Something fell into the stream, reddening its clear surface. As the canoe swept on, Sebastian glanced backward, and beheld a long tuft-lock trailing upon the water. For the next few seconds nothing was heard save the slight sound of the skillfully and rapidly falling paddles.

CHAPTER XXVI. ON THE WATER.

Each of the Northern adventurers expected to hear the thrilling war-cry of the Blackfoot answered from many clamorous throats; but the intermountain quietude remained unbroken. Neither wolf, prairie-dog, nor panther, disturbed the deep solitude. The canoe shot steadily onward. Considerable time elapsed before the wily trapper perceptibly relaxed his

vigilance of eye and ear, or thought it prudent to trust the sound of his voice. It was now that Pathaway had opportunity to observe him when peril impended; to note his coolness; the absence of hurry and perturbation from his deportment, and to recognize the wonderful acuteness of his senses. For himself, he manifested no uneasiness; it was only when his gaze rested upon the slight figure of Sebastian that a wave of anxiety ruffled his features.

"The branches hang low," he muttered, raising his head, and speaking in those indescribable tones that are the true index of danger, "the branches hang low, and the trees stand thick together like platoons of soldiers. I notice the timber when it grows in that way; it's a poaty sight to me in gin'ral, for Natur and I are on friendly footin'; but on sich occasions as this, I see the rows of trunks and the green foliage with distrust—a creepin' of the blood, like little mites of ice in the veins. 'Tisn't fear—you understand the feelin', Shoshoné. Take away the 'sponsibility of perfectin' and carin' for somebody, and I should walk this timber like a Camanche on the trail; or what's more Christian and civilized, like an old free trapper, as I be."

"What do you think?" Pathaway asked, bending toward the hunter, and unconsciously, as it would seem, in his earnestness, placing his hand on Sebastian's shoulder.

The youth shrank from the touch, then smiled at his own sensitiveness.

Indian Joe flashed spitefully at the hunter as he withdrew his hand.

"I think that my shootin'-tube spoke rather loud, and must have been heard by them that seek us; but the simple crack of a rifle wouldn't locate us with any great sartinty. On the water we leave no trail, but if they discover the place where we launched this canoe, they'll be houndin' arter us afore long."

"Do you not know," continued Pathaway, "some covert, nook, or hiding-place where this wounded lad can find safety?"

"I wish you and Nicholas would feel less care for me. Safety is worth no more to me than to you. This wound is comparatively of no account, only so far as it prevents me from—from defending myself. It cannot, it shall not make me burdensome!" exclaimed Sebastian.

"Stop the craft, Ingin," said Nick, with a backward motion of his hand.

"Doubledark is a fox!" answered the Shoshoné.

They had reached a spot where the banks were less thickly studded with trees, and which permitted a further range of vision. Nicholas pointed with his rifle to a cluster of piñon that was scarcely perceptible in the darkness and distance.

"The eyes of Doubledark conquer the night!" added Multnomah.

"Put the birch ashore, chief."

Pathaway strained his eyes, but saw nothing to render the clump of trees an object of suspicion. The vessel touched the bank; Nick sprang out.

"Wait for me, redskin, and I'll soon bring you word whether the stream is clear."

"I will go also," said Pathaway, leaping to the bank.

"No," replied the trapper, "I'm afeard your foot is not light enough. You're better used to the trail of four-footed animiles than to them with two."

"I am accustomed to an active life, and cannot remain passive when there is danger, and action is required. Lead on, Doubledark, and possibly you'll think less lightly of my skill."

"I know you're mighty good at some things, colonel; but approachin' an enemy at his bivouac is a different matter from stannin' boldly up to a danger that's right afore ye, and don't need to be unmasked."

"I am not a novice, and do insist upon sharing my proportion of danger," returned Pathaway, with firmness.

"Well, you're a handy lad, and I allow can be trusted where others would be in the way."

Without further discussion, Nick started off at a quick pace, followed by Pathaway. Had the ground been even, the distance to the piñon would have been quickly and easily accomplished; but being rough and unequal, the task was not unattended with difficulty. Guiding through grass and bushes without effort, apparently, Nicholas reached the margin of the timber; before which time the gray hunter had discovered light puffs of smoke occasionally mounting against the sky, or drifting fitfully along the tops of the trees.

"Many eyes might be deceived," observed Nicholas, "and mistake that smoke for a vapor risin' from the ground; but it's real smoke comin' from a fire kindled with dry leaves and sticks, fed slowly by exper'enced hands, to keep a clear flame. We of the wilderness understand these things, you see."

"It is smoke, without question," the other replied.

"I won't tell ye to be cautious, 'cause you've sense enough to know that we must be carpent like when we're dealin' with the neathen that make tricks and stratagems a part o' their life. Come on, colonel, and show your p'int."

Throwing forward his thin and supple body, the trapper pushed his way into the timber. His form had lost none of its more youthful vigor. The muscles had grown stronger with exercise, and toil had consolidated bone and sinew.

While the hunter admired his noiseless locomotion, he strove in vain to equal it.

"You do 'mazin' well, colonel," he whispered; "but a stick will sometimes crack and a bush shake with the most skillful of us. You'll git the knack on't with practice. Hist! We're clost onto 'em, by mighty!"

Nick's long finger was pointed to an opening in the trees, and Pathaway following its direction, saw dusky figures sitting by a fire so small that the blaze could have been covered by one's hand. Nicholas made a warning gesture to the hunter, and again moved on, with his knees to the earth and his rifle thrown out before him.

Several minutes passed before they attained a position offering them a full view of the group.

"Look!" said Nick, grasping Pathaway by the arm, and putting his lips to Nick's ear. "See that varmint with his back partly toward us? It's Jack Wiley! The piñon critter's forgot the service I done him. If it hadn't been for me, his skulp would be hangin' this minute in a Blackfoot lodge!"

The trapper threw his rifle a trifle more in advance, and laid his cheek to the breech.

"A nice chance! a nice chance!" he muttered. "What a pity the airth can't be relieved of sich a mean skunk immediate! Ah, colonel! how human natur is sometimes put to it for patience!"

The object of the hunter's remarks turned his face to the fire in addressing one of his savage comrades; Pathaway recognized it at once.

"They've killed some kind o' game lately, most likely, and have stopped to cook and eat. Huge feeders are Ingins, though they can fast when worst comes to worst. If you'd jest tried your skill on his jug'lar art'ries when you had him tied at Trapper Trace, you wouldn't been guilty o' no great crime."

Pathaway had frequently seen Indians in their war-paint, but never so completely changed from the common form of humanity as these. There were eight of them, most wickedly bedaubed and metamorphosed with various pigments and savage arts. Their visages, as lighted up by the tremulous blaze, were truly startling. Pathaway thought of Sebastian, and experienced painful anxiety for his safety.

"I've drawed a bead on him," said Nick, whose ire was excited by the treachery of Wiley. "Shall I pull trigger, colonel?"

"No, no!" whispered Pathaway. "Such an act would be folly. Calm yourself!"

"I couldn't be calmer; and not that, neither, for I'm stirred up in'ardly. Fine company he's in, isn't he? What's more frightful nor an Ingin in his paint; to them, I mean, that isn't 'customed to the sight. But what is it? On'y a little red and white clay with a streak o' black in't. Sich contrivances may do for women and children, boys leas'twise; but full grown men, of whatsomnever color, should be 'bove it. But it's their natur', and that's all we can say. Eight of 'em besides Wiley, and quite near the stream, too. You can jes' ketch a glimpse on't runnin' like a silver thread out yender. Wonder how we shall git by? We can try it, and if they sight us we've the consolation o' knowin' we've four good rifles."

The hunter made no answer, but watched the grim group with breathless interest. A noise, so very slight that it was scarcely audible, caused him to look backward over his shoulder; behind him stood the dog Calamity, with his nose uplifted, and his large eyes fixed with striking intensity upon the savages, the hairs on his head and back erect and bristling.

"The dog has come!" said the hunter.

"I know it," returned Nicholas. "He's been stannin' ahind ye some time, but don't be skeerd; he's slier and more cat-like nor you be. The critter's follered me miles on the trail 'thout disturbin' a leaf, and notuin' suits him better. He isn't interested in common doin's, he isn't, but is in his element when there's danger. Obsarve," added Nick, in the same low whisper in which the conversation had been carried on, "how fierce his eyes glow! He's brave, I allow! At a motion of my finger he'd fly 'nto the midst of 'em, and like it amazin'. But I s'pose we might as well creep back, for our arrant seems to be done. Turn tail, Calamity, and heave ahead!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE REFUGE.

Nick stepped silently into the canoe. The Shoshoné glanced at the trapper's uncommunicative face and patiently waited for him to speak.

"Eight of 'em," said Nick, turning his eyes anxiously to the east. "Eight, and Jack Wiley is with 'em. Daylight is comin' and their fire burns well down to the bank, but we'll try it, Ingin. It's runnin' the g'antlet, as 'twere, but that I've done afore. Step aboard, colonel. 'Twas 'mong the Crows that I run the g'antlet, Shoshoné. I's fresh in the trappin'-grounds, then. I could took care o' myself well 'nough if I'd been alone and hadn't had a young feller with me, who was new from the big clearin's and not up to the ways o' the kentry. His hoss was shot under him and he was wounded in the leg. Recollect mighty well how he looked as he sot on the ground, the pieter o' despair."

"This is the last o' me, Nick," sez he. "I've got to die," sez he.

"I'm afeard so!" sez I.

"I've got brethers and sisters that'll cry for me," sez he, "and a mother, too," sez he.

"You can't tell how the word 'mother' started me; it tetches somethin' tender in my natur'. I's mounted on a hoss as swift as the wind: Suggestion his name was; an odd name, but a good critter. If you should ever meet Buck Bison, Ingin, he'll tell ye the p'int o' that animile."

"Jim," sez I, "I've got no mother to cry for me!" And with that I leaped from Suggestion's back quicker'n a wink. The Crows was then pesky nigh, mounted most of 'em, and yellin' like a hundred catamounts.

"There shan't be no weepin' for you, Jim," sez I, "if I can help it," takin' him from the ground and puttin' him into the saddle in half a second.

"Good God, Nick! What are you doin'?" sez he.

"Take the reins," sez I, "and if there's hoss-flesh that can save you, it's under ye."

"You never seed sich a 'stonished look, I allow, as he give me! He looked as if he's willin' to die hisself, then. He was goin' to say somethin' that was chokin' him, when I give Suggestion a cut, and off he darted."

"God bless you, Nick!" was the words that came back to me as the hoss whirled him away."

"And you, Nick, and you?" interrogated Sebastian.

Nicholas smoothed his beard, made a motion to the Shoshoné, and quietly answered:

"I sot down on the ground where Jim had been a moment afore, with my arms aside me. In the fury of pursuit, two thirds o' the varmints galloped by me; but presently I was diskivered and surrounded with red faces, tufted heads, guns, and tomahawks. I fought 'em, and there was a few hosses that scampered off 'thout a redskin to ride 'em. There was yellin's and hootin's, I swear to gracious! I's taken, in course, as I told ye, and there was great rejoicin's. When we reached the Crow camp, I's obleeged to run atween two rows o' warriors, armed with all sorts o' weepens, to be used for my benefit. Soon's they'd placed me and told me to run, I leaped up like a wounded bufferler, 'lighted on the head and shoulders of a copperskin, wrenched away his weepen, and cleared a path through the varmints like lightnin'. In less'n half a minute I's in the timber, with the whole Nor'west afore me. My friends was surprised to see me come into camp, havin' give me up for lost."

"And the young man?" said Sebastian, inquiringly.

"Was safe and sound, savin' the little gunshot diffikitty in his leg. Gunshot diffikilties a'n't allers mortal, little 'un; I've had 'em, and I know what they be. Keep nearer the

right bank, Shoshoné; the closer we git to it the better it'll be, for the sarpen's 'll be more likely to look over us."

Nicholas raised his long slim neck, and cast a calculating eye toward the growth of pinon.

"'Twas a noble act!" said Delaunay, with enthusiasm.

"Shoshoné, you can see them little puffs misting up through the trees; other eyes might mistake 'em for wreaths of fog, but you and I, chief, know better. And the colonel, too, has an eye and a mighty knack, I allow. Frenchman, raise your paddle and let the birch drift; the Ingin will guide it; it's his natur' to manage a canoe."

There were signs of the coming day in the east—a faint tinge low down on the horizon; a soft glow between the earth and sky.

"Now bend low, all of ye, and screen your heads as much as possible!" suggested the ever-careful Nick.

"Let your head sink a little lower," whispered Pathaway to Sebastian Delaunay. "It offers a mark to an enemy."

"Why should I fear an enemy more than you?" he answered. "I am sure you offer a better target to a marksman than I."

"I care not; I am wont to danger; but you, you—"

Pathaway paused.

Sebastian looked up with a start.

"Caution is better nor courage," said Nick Whiffles. "'Tis here, leastwise."

The canoe floated steadily toward the point of danger. The stream fell off as they proceeded, and the current grew quicker. Here and there white water and a broken surface told where rocks were hidden, but the Shoshoné, with a motion of his paddle, sent the vessel this way or that, shunning the dangerous spots with the skill and ease of long practice.

As they neared the pines, each mind was naturally expectant. Even the face of Nick became more intense in expression, and the manner of the Shoshoné more wary and absorbed in his employment. Gently the light craft drifted on. They were passing the fire, when it was drawn into an eddy and whirled around several times. Pathaway believed discovery inevitable. Glancing shoreward, he saw dusky forms, some sitting, and some standing; Jack Wiley was prominent in the group. It was manifest, from the sudden contraction of Nick's brows, that he, too, saw the same spectacle. The canoe rocked, swayed to and fro, trembled an instant, then shot from the circling waters into the current, governed by the potent hand of the Shoshoné.

Some time elapsed before a word was spoken, during which the arm of Portneuf aided in propelling the vessel. The roaring of a fall was heard, and the chief turned the canoe to the shore, which in that place was sterile and rocky.

"Git out—hide canoe—go no further by water," he said.

The parties stepped out upon the rocks. In obedience to the direction of the chief, Nick and Portneuf lifted the canoe upon their shoulders, and carrying it several rods, stopped at the fall. The stream, which was narrow, was still narrower there. The water fell over the ledge some six feet in a clear, unbroken sheet. Under this fall the canoe was thrust, and the water, shooting over it, effectually concealed it from view.

"Nobody but an Ingin," said Nick, "or some one that knowed Ingin ways, would thought of sich a hidin'-place. But there you see 'tis, with a ledge shelvin' over it, and the watery elements coverin' it like a blanket. Which way now, chief, for we trust this matter wholly to you?"

"This way," answered Multnomah. "One at a time, and step as I do."

"One at a time means Ingin file; and by steppin' as he does, means to tread in his tracks; and not in his tracks neither, 'cause he won't make none; but to put your feet where he puts his'n. Don't step too long, Shoshoné, for Sparrer-Legs hasn't a long span of the leg as 'twere."

A single ray of sunlight darted across the ranges, falling like a trail of gold toward the west.

"See!" said Multnomah, "the Master of Life sends us a guide. 'Tis a good sign, Doubledark, and we'll follow it."

"Sartin! sartin!" said Nick. Then to Pathaway, apologetically: "'Tis the natur' of a heathen to b'lieve in signs, omens, and manitos, and I a'n't sure but they're right. Why

shouldn't they be? Don't they live the nearest to natur'? Isn't natur' pooty much as the Great Spirit made it?"

"I'm not much of a causist!" responded Pathaway.

"I don't know what that may happen to be, colonel, nor I don't keer much; but it stan's ye in hand to know more nor I do on 'count o' your book-larnin'."

"My sweetheart was a prairie-flower,
She dwelt beside the flowing water;
I wooed her in her wildwood bower,
I loved the wand'ring trapper's daughter.
Oh, the trapper's daughter!"

It was the voice of Andrew Jeanjean, singing. Nicholas sprang to stop him, but the strain was so soft and musical, and vibrated so plaintively through the trees, that he could not find it in his heart to check him till the touching burden of his song had ceased.

"I've got a new idee," said the trapper, gently; "and not a new idee, neither, for I've carried it about in my thinkin' orgins sev'ril days. I'm goin' to operate on that critter's head, by mighty."

The trapper levelled his long forefinger at Andrew.

"Pistols, traps, peltries, buffaloes, and other things!" said Jeanjean, with his unmeaning face turned to Nick.

"Jes' so! jes' so!" responded Nick, nodding. "Specially other things! Dr. Whiffles used to operate a sight on broken heads. He used to japan 'em; that is, take out a piece o' bone and clap in a piece o' silver instead on't."

"That process is called trepanning, unole Nick," said Sebastian.

"I said trapannin'; and right well the doctor knew how to do it. Now I don't 'tend to go the whole figger and put in a piece o' silver, but just insert the p'int o' my knife and lift up the bone where it presses on the brain. I've got a steady hand, and I'm sure I can bring back his reason, or leave him no worse off nor I found him. I won't kill him, leastwise. I've sounded the diffikilty with my fingers, and diskivered the skull pushed right down into the soft parts. I used to know the tetchnical names of the orgins. I ha'n't forgot the titles of the two milkbranes that the thinkin' fakilties is done up in, like blankets: one's called the *p'ison-matter* and 'tother the *do-ye-matter*."

"The *pia mater* and *dura mater*, I think," said Pathaway.

"Sartin, so I said and so 'tis. I was well versed in these things when I's with the old doctor that practiced Lobely. I know what he'd do, if he's here—not Dr. Whiffles, but the botany doctor—he'd give him a 'metio; but I don't 'magine 'twould start the skull an artem. No, no! it wouldn't do it, though it has a great raisin' power so far as the stumich is concerned. Tread carefully, sonny, and step in the same place. Ingin, don't take sich long strides; the boy has a diffikilty in reachin'. He isn't set up so fur from the ground as you be, you know. Lower posted, so to speak."

For an hour or more, the Shoshoné pursued a straight course over a hard, unyielding soil, then, reaching the deep gulch, turned suddenly to the south. Nick and Pathaway looked at him inquiringly, but asked no questions. The gulch led them to a valley running to the east, which they followed till the sun was high in the heavens. Sebastian and Indian Joe showed unmistakable signs of weariness, the former being supported the latter part of the way by Nick, and assisted by Pathaway whenever the trapper afforded him an opportunity, which was seldom. Joe began to lag, and Nicholas fearing that he meditated leaving them, making fatigue a pretext to favor the design, made the dog Calamity, *alias* Misfortune, walk at his heels and keep guard over his movements.

The boy, clearly, entertained a great terror of the dog, and his muttered growls and distrustful looks always had the effect to quicken his pace. Pathaway remarked that he really seemed exhausted, and advised halting a few moments to give him needed rest.

"An Ingin boy git tired!" exclaimed Nick, incredulously. "That's onreasonable, colonel. Redskin boys are calkulated mostly for runnin'. He's makin' it, depend on't." Then to Joe, with threatening brow:

"Come along, Little P'ison! Don't play 'possum with an old hunter. Look at Misfortune; he's a smilin' at ye from ahind; he'll have hold o' your heels next."

Joe stopped and supported himself by a tree, then his form sank, and he gradually slid down to the root, murmuring:

"Ingin Joe tired; no walk no more."

Nick stepped back and deliberately raised the lad's head from his hands in which he had rested it.

"What a set o' boys we've got, by mighty! The sarpint's cryin', or jest ready to, true's you live. You'll make a great warrior, won't you, sonny? Your name'll be famous 'mong your red brethren 'thout doubt!"

"You are hard upon Joe," said Pathaway. "He is probably unused to walking. Children among the Blackfeet are accustomed to ride from infancy, or at least as soon as they are large enough to cling to a horse's mane. Your dog is too watchful, and really partakes of your own distrust. Call him away, Nicholas, and I'll help Joe along."

"Queer boy! condemned queer boy!" muttered Nick to himself.

"Wabuma!" exclaimed the Shoshone, leading on again.

Pathaway took the Indian youth by the arm, and with this friendly support he was able to proceed for half an hour longer, when a sudden turn in the valley brought them in sight of the mimic city.

"The Ingin knows what he's about," said Nicholas, in reply to an inquiring glance from Pathaway. "He's doubled on our track and come back ag'in. The critters won't think o' lookin' for us so near home. A little ahead of us is the Devil's Gate, which is hid from view now by the objects atween. The chief knows a hidin'-place for us up thereaways, I'll be bound."

Multnomah struck to the left, and the parties were soon winding among towering rocks, beside which their figures looked like pigmies. Pathaway believed he now understood what the chief meant when he spoke of the birds building their nests high up among the rocks.

"'Twas a good idee," quoth Nick. "The Shoshone is wise. Bear up a few minutes longer, little 'un, and we'll be at the end of our tramp. It's hard climbin', but we'll soon conquer it."

Pausing occasionally for the parties to breathe, Multnomah ascended obliquely the mountain-side to a point half way to the summit, and nearly opposite the Devil's Gate. At that spot the towers, walls, and columns of the mimic city were most conspicuous, rising like gigantic works of art fallen to ruins.

"Doubledark, here we rest. A band of warriors might hide here. Our enemies are like dogs thrown from the scent of game by running water," said Multnomah.

"All that's true enough, Ingin; but we shall have to eat and drink the same as other folks in the course o' natur', and game can't be very abundant hereabouts."

"Doubledark is a hunter; he knows the path of the mountain-sheep, and the trail where the deer and the buffalo go down to the streams to drink. He is not a squaw to sit down and starve."

"True, Shoshone! Doubledark, nor them that is with him will never starve while there's a hoof or a feather of game in the Nor'west."

Pathaway examined with considerable curiosity the retreat in which he now found himself. He was particularly impressed with the vast monuments around him. He had seldom contemplated Nature in a wilder and grander mood. He had some difficulty in persuading himself that he was not treading the ruins of an ancient city. But there were no marks of the chisel upon the broad surfaces of column and shaft; the walls were hewn by Nature—upborn from the quarry beneath by a mighty strength.

Multnomah had chosen for a place of concealment a rocky chamber at the base of one of the most imposing of the mimic castles. Nick and Portneuf covered the rough floor with a carpet of wild sage and such foliage as they could find growing where there was sufficient soil for vegetation. The blankets of the parties were spread over this, furnishing a couch by no means to be despised by wearied and hunted fugitives. It is true that the iron frame of Nick had suffered little or no diminution of strength; but Sebastian and the Indian youth were so much exhausted, that evidently they could have proceeded no farther.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SEX AND SEBASTIAN.

Nick Whiffles attended carefully to the wounded arm, and when the lad was as com-

fortably placed as his meagre means would allow, he seemed greatly relieved, and much of his anxiety vanished.

"He needs sleep and rest arter his exertions," he remarked to Pathaway, as they issued together from the stony portals of their hiding-place. "It's somethin' peculiar to the lad that he likes to be by hisself when any thing ails him." Then to Multnomah:

"Chief, is there any water hereabouts? The boy must be powerful thirsty by this time."

The Shoshone made an affirmative movement of the head, and went to procure the element in question.

"There's a subject upon which I wish to talk with you," said Pathaway, drawing Nick aside.

"Well, colonel, I'm willin' to hear any man's talk when it's reasonable. Let's set down in the shade o' this wall, for I pose it's a subject that can be spoke on settin' as well as stannin'."

"It is a matter that I scarcely know how to approach," Pathaway added, with some embarrassment.

"Can't 'magine what 'tis, rejoined Nick, with a little start. "Never had no secrets in my life; and not in my life, neither, but none worth mentionin', lately. Some o' my family had secrets; an aunt o' mine was full of 'em. Myster'ous lookin' critter, she was. Was allers shakin' her head in a mighty knowin' way, and puttin' her finger 'er lips. She got to be so full o' information that it perduced combustion o' the brain, at last."

"I have observed," continued Pathaway, "your treatment of young Delaunay—"

"Treatment!" exclaimed Nick; "ha'n't I allers treated him well? Could I treated him better if he'd been my own brother?"

"You could not, indeed; and it was that very fact, combined with the peculiar delicacy of the boy, that first aroused my suspicions."

The trapper's face flushed; and either anger or confusion, or a blending of both, struggled within him.

"'Spicion," he said, slowly, "is a word I don't like to hear; for, if I understand the deformation of the word, it means a sort of mistrust that all isn't right—or, in other words, is a kind o' low cunning about somethin' that should be open and above-board. Your talk don't begin well, colonel, and I think we'd better let the subject drop; though I'll be condemned if I know what the subject is."

"I mean no offence in the world!" answered Pathaway, earnestly. "But I wish simply to say, that your tenderness of the youth; your constant regard for his welfare; your affection for him displayed in innumerable ways; your ready and sometimes incongruous apologies for his weaknesses—together with the singular beauty of his face and form, the smallness of his hands and feet—have given rise to the suspicion that the object of your solicitude is not a boy, but a woman."

Nick's embarrassment was too evident to be unnoticed—and with it, too, was mingled much that was painful. Pathaway waited for him to recover from the effects of his announcement.

"He's as good a boy," said Nick, doggedly, "as ever walked. You can see he's a boy, plain 'nough, by his clothes; for any fool knows that a boy wears boy's clothes, and a gal wears gal's clothes. They're made different, boy's and gal's clothes be. It's jest the difference atween gowns and trowsers. Now, do you s'pose if that boy had been of t'other sex, but I'd put masculine toggery on him? Oh Lord, no! I'd as soon 'a' thought o' puttin' a grizzly bear in a monkey-skin, or jest contrawise—which would be a monkey in a bear-skin. What do you s'pose a feminine could do straddlin' about 'mong the rocks in trowsers? 'Twould be as ludicrous as 'twould be for me to put on petticoats, and give myself the dainty airs of a city miss. Begin to see how rydicerous 'tis, don't ye? Never felt more like laughin' nor I do now, I swear to gracious!"

Nick tried to laugh his old whimsical laugh, but the effort was a miserable failure.

"It won't do, friend Nicholas—the boy is a girl!" replied Pathaway, smiling.

"Do you think that we Nor'westers ketch gals in trowsers as we do beavers in traps? Is feminine natur' so abundant that we haven't petticoats to put it in? 'Tisn't easy for a woman to 'pear like a boy, I tell ye. My oldest sister tried it, for a lark, among the young

fellars; but the smallness of her waist, and the gin'ral developments of her constitution, together with her mincin' way o' steppin', brung her out to once. Now a woman don't step long, Colonel; but that boy Sebastian'll span the ground beyend all account. You'd oughter to see him pace it off when he's in a hurry! Ag'in, a feminine has a kind o' knittin'-work, swingin' motion sideways; but you may draw a line each side o' that boy close to him, and he won't niggle enough either way to tetch. As for the matter o' hands and feet, I don't 'member that I've seed bigger ones on any lad of his age and size. Recollect, Colonel, I said *age* and *size*."

"I admire your fidelity to your interesting protégé, but tell you plainly that the question is settled beyond doubt in my own mind. Even Indian Joe detected the imposture at once."

"Ingin Joe'll git his ears cut off if he isn't keeful!" returned the trapper, tartly.

Pathaway waited for Nick to cool again.

"It's sometimes pesky hard," he added, anon, persuasively, "to tell a boy from a gal. I knowed a p'ison diffikilty that grewed out of sich a case: 'twas an offspring of Dr. Whiffles was the subject of it. Fust, they tried petticoats; then, trowsers; then, finally, fell back on petticoats ag'in."

"Believe me, my friend, I am deeply interested in the youth you call Sebastian; and I have no doubt but you are governed by the best of motives. Rest assured that I shall do nothing to disoblige you, but everything in my power for her protection and comfort. Whether she had any part in the tragedy of Black Rock, I know not, nor shall I ask. I seek no disclosures from you. I did not think it right longer to deceive you in regard to my convictions. Woman ever has and ever will have paramount claims upon my respect and the protection of my arm."

"You mean well, Colonel, and I thank ye; and you argue so well, that I should doubt the gender myself if I hadn't made up my mind. But I can't quite give in; I've said boy, and boy it shall be. When my gran'father writ a thing when he's travelin', he never altered it and writ it over, if it turned out to be never so big a lie arterwards; and he gin'erly put a note in the margin under sich places to prop'em up. But so fur's the boy's consarned, there's no weak places to prop up. Once when he's travelin'—my gran'father—in Hindostan, in his hoss and shay (about which hoss and shay a song has been writ and composed, and which I'll sing to ye when I git time), he seed a child hangin' from a tree in a basket. He stopped his vehickel immedjate, arter ridin' round the tree three times to collect his fakilities and the facts, and writ that all the children born in Hindostan was put in baskets, and left to swing on the trees till they perished or was eat up by the birds. A few paragrams below he writ (he'd driv into a village then, I s'pect) that the kentry was thickly settled with a 'normously increasin' poperlation, which threatened to overrun its borders if some sickness didn't put a stop to it. My gran'father took the census of every kentry he driv through, which was a work o' some magnitude in some places, 'especialy where they didn't hang their children in baskets. Some races o' men he found mostly extinct. The Tartars, for instance, was reduced to a hundred million—which was melancholy."

Pathaway listened patiently for Nick to talk himself out of breath; but the trapper exhibited no sign of weariness. Subject-matter appeared to stretch before him as measureless as the prairies he delighted in, and as varied as the Northwest. While he was making a longer pause than usual at a period, the hunter arose and quietly left him, to take a more careful survey of Trapper Valley and the region around it.

This conversation took place just outside the natural chamber where Sebastian was reclining. Now it happened that there was a passage between the rocks that transmitted sounds with great facility; and thus the youth accidentally became a party to all that passed between the hunter and the trapper. He listened with varying emotions, and sought the Shoshone at the close of the singular interview. He spoke earnestly with the chief for a few moments; and shortly after, when Nick looked for Multnomah, he could not be found.

CHAPTER XIX.

A SURGICAL OPERATION.

Meantime Indian Joe, who appeared to be sleeping, had ears that were quite as acute as those of the anomalous boy Sebastian, and heard every word of the conversation that passed between Nicholas and the gray hunter. He kept his secret, however, till the darkness of night veiled the scenery of Mimic City. Leaving his concealment, he walked in the open air; and seeing the trapper returning (who had been out in quest of game, and approached with a mountain sheep upon his shoulders) hastened to meet him.

"Hullo! is it you, Little P'ison? Got over your bad feelin's, eh?" queried Nicholas.

"Joe sleep—feel better. He somethin' to say to the great trapper," answered the boy.

Nick threw down his burden, and looked curiously at Joe.

"One must allers have his eyes open when an Ingin flatters," he replied—"specially a pesky queer Ingin like you. But speak out; as your kind of insex say, 'My ears are open, and I'll hear your talk of whatsomever natur'."

"Joe no bad Ingin; he got heart; he hear the pale-face cryin' for his daughter; he see tears run down. Joe know where she is. He lead Doubledark to her; Doubledark take her away—bring her here."

Whiffles braced his long rifle out before him, leaned his tall, wiry form against it, and looked down upon the youth with an expression half credulous, half doubting.

"Put a punctoation there, and wait while I sharpen my fakilities with a trifle o' the weed."

The trapper drew a small package of tobacco from the pouch at his side, and conveyed it deliberately to his mouth, as if the more slowly he performed the operation the less tardy would be his thoughts. Making a few lazy oscillations of his jaws over the narcotic morsel, he said:

"There's some dispersions that I know almost at a glance, and there's others that I don't; 'mong the last I may safely reckon your'n; for you're a bit o' human natur' that staggers me. Durin' all my travelin' over mountings and peraries, over rivers and lakes, I've never struck the trail of a heathen so puzzlin' in his mental and physikal makin' up. There's been no good will atween us, as you know, Little P'ison, and it strikes me as borderin' on the ludickerous when you come to me with sich a projeck. It does, by lightnin'!"

Joe had waited patiently for the trapper to gather his thoughts and make these remarks, but did not raise his eyes to the face of Nick and more than once pressed his white teeth upon his under lip, as if in an effort to curb a strong feeling.

"Joe thought Doubledark pitied the French pale-face; but he was wrong; he will speak of it no more. The great chief down in the Valley will take the young squaw for his wife."

Joe turned to go.

"Don't be so techy, Little P'ison, for I ha'n't said yes or no, yet. Want to take the bearin's o' the case fust. The Whiffleses isn't generly of a rash natur, though that disorder went through our family when we's young. I'm never in a hurry 'bout comin' to a p'int when a thing is onsartin. Let's come at it, systematic, as 'twere. I understan' ye to say that you can lead me to this gal? Jest turn the axletrees o' your eyes on mine."

The dark-brown orbs of the Indian youth were firmly raised to Nick's. There might have been a nervous quiver in them, at first, but it was of transient duration.

"Can't read 'em, can't read 'em!" said Nicholas, shaking his head. "They a'n't sich as I've come in contact with a great 'eal. They're both soft and fiery, open and cunnin at the same time, timid and fierce. Little P'ison, you're what my gran'father used to call a non-description."

"Doubledark is afraid! His heart grows smaller as he grows older. He is not like Seven Plumes, the great chief of the Black-foot nation."

"And God be praised for't! I don't keer to be like a heathen noways, savin' and exceptin' allers the Shoshoné, who's more of a feller bein' nor some of lighter complexions."

"To the Shoshoné Joe will go."

At that moment Andrew Jeanjean was heard singing "The Trapper's Daughter." Nick's feelings were touched. He saw, too, at a little distance, Portneuf pacing to and fro with a

melancholy air.

"Young Ingin," he added, more seriously, "I ha'n't much faith in ye, as you un'arstan', but compassion for the gal and for others, moves me. I a'n't a hard man, nor never was. Pity is no stranger to the breast of Nick Whiffles; he's found a place at his mental camp-fire more nor once, and will ag'in. I've risked somethin' for Beauty afore now. There was Baby Blanche, the 'dopted darter of Buck Bison; and there was Sylveen Vander, the nat'ral darter of old Saul Vander, the Guide; two as dainty bits of womanhood as you can find in the world. For each of 'em I did my best. I had little gunshot diffikilities on their account, not to mention other diffikilities. But Lord bless ye, Ingin, I've got used to 'em; shouldn't 'joy myself 'thout 'em. I'll trust ye, boy, I'll trust ye; and if you betray me to my inemies, you'll do a deed that you'll be sorry for when you start for the happy hunting-grounds. Nick Whiffles never injured you nor your'n; and not your'n, neither; for he's been obleeged in self-preservation to bring down a redskin now and then, but 'thout malice or a forethought."

Joe's face grew brighter; his eyes sparkled with animation.

"It seems to please ye," said the trapper, musingly. "I hope it's all right, and there's no diviltry at the bottom. I've a quick eye and a quick hand, lad, and you won't die full-grown if your treachery becomes apperient afore you're ready."

"Ugh!" articulated Joe, contemptuously. "Too much doubt makes a coward. When a great Ingin chief do a thing, he no say great many words. Joe will be ready in an hour."

"It'll be dark, then," said Nick, reflectively, casting his eyes toward the heavens. "We shall need darkness, I allow. We'll go alone, Ingin. The colonel and the Frenchman may stay to look arter the wounded lad and Jeanjean. Poor Andrew! I must patch up his head afore long. The brain's a tender p'int, but I don't see why it can't be put in runnin' order well's a watch."

Nick stopped and thought about it.

"Doubledark will be silent. His tongue no talk 'bout goin'."

A wave of distrust rolled across the trapper's mind, but considering the object in view, he generously and unselfishly shook it off.

"Joe will find you behind the rocks, down there, when it's time to go."

"I'll be there, boy," answered Nick, and taking up his burden, hastened to join those who were expecting his return. Selecting the daintiest portions of the sheep, he cooked them with the skill and care of one thoroughly versed in such matters, and carried them to Sebastian.

"Over to the left, not fur from here, in a direct line, you'll find water clear as crystal, gushing from the rock," said Nick.

"You're goin' away, Nick; I know by your looks," the youth answered, quickly.

"Portneuf is grievin' for his darter."

"His sorrow has touched your generous heart, uncle Nick."

"Why shouldn't it, child? If you's shut up down yender, in the valley, at the mercy of lawless men, do you think I could rest?" returned the trapper, earnestly.

"You could not; you would brave everything for my sake."

"True, child, true! And why shouldn't I do the same for another? She's less, much less to me nor you be, yet it can't be denied that she has a claim on my exertions. Humanity is humanity, whether in the wilderness or other places. The colonel is here, and if I shouldn't come back, I couldn't leave ye in hands tenderer or carefuller."

"Don't talk in that strain, my friend, for such a possibility is painful. Who goes with you?"

"The young Ingin—Little P'ison, I call him. He proposed it, and I concluded to trust him."

Sebastian mused, then looking anxiously at Nick, replied:

"I have misgivings, my friend; I doubt Indian Joe. He is, in truth, a strange compound of sullenness, timidity, and fire. Sometimes he looks at me with an expression angry and forbidding."

"I've noticed it; but it comes of the crookedness of Ingin natur'. He can't help what's in him, I s'pect, 'cause it's in his blood; and what's in one's blood, can't very well be got out. No two of us are alike. One takes to the bush, another to the city; one likes his kind, another hates it. One takes on airs and

haughty ways, while another wears his manners as he does a suit of old clothes—with ease and without stiffness. I know he's a queer redskin, this Ingin Joe; but if there's any truth in him, I'll give it a chance to show itself."

"Let me warn you not to put too much faith in him. You have treated him with some severity, and I am sure that he can have but little real friendship for you, and but slight sympathy with your present purpose. If you must undertake this perilous enterprise, I entreat you to be guarded, and watchful of the boy."

"Sartin! The Ingins call me Doubledark," said Nicholas, with some pride.

"Your skill I do not doubt; but who can guard against treachery?" said the youth.

"Jes' so! Treachery has to do with the heart and the motives, and we can't allers tell what them be. Howsomnever, we'll hope for the best. Here comes the colonel! Colonel, I'm goin' to perform that operation now on Jeanjean's head. I brought a piece o' pitch-pine for a torch, knowin' 'twould be dark afore I got back."

"The operation is so delicate, that really, Nick—" began Pathaway.

"Yes, colonel, I allow it looks ventur'some; but with steady nerves I feel that I can manage it. I won't hurt him. If I can on'y raise up them two plates o' the skull—the skull is composed of two plates, as you probably understan' with your book-larnin'—if I can raise 'em a trifle, I say, his wand'ring fakilities 'll come back at a gallop, across the perairies of his present vacancy. Let's go out ahind the ruins, and you shall be assistant surgeon; that is, you shall hold the torch; and to hold a torch well requires some judgment. I'd put it off till to-morrer, and take daylight for't; but nobody can tell what a day'll bring forth. Come here, you Andrew Jeanjean, and I'll try to call in your wits that have gone out trap-pin', so to speak."

Jeanjean followed the trapper and Pathaway, and, in obedience to the command of the former, seated himself behind a column of rock. Nick lighted a large splinter of the pitch-pine which he had procured for the purpose, and handed it to Pathaway, who was beginning to feel uneasy.

Nick produced a pocket-knife, and examined its edge.

"It's pooty sharp, I allow," he said, with a satisfied air; "and if 'twasn't, 'twouldn't make no great difference, for there isn't much cuttin' to do, and if there was, 'twouldn't hurt him but little, the vitality of his system is so let down. I'd oughter been a surg'in, prehaps; but we sometimes mistake our callin', and go blunderin' through the whole business o' life. I knowed a man who was once full o' the missioner sperit, that arterwards become a whisky-trader 'mong the Ingins. Then, ag'in, I've seen them become doctors as was kalkilated for honest clodhoppers, and cut across muscles in opening abscesses, or distractin' bullets or splinters lodged in the flesh; than which common sense oughter teach a person better. Ag'in," added Nick, laying his left hand on Jeanjean's head, and holding the pocket-knife aloft in the other, "it has come under my observation durin' sich times as I've stopped in the clearin's, that individuals get into the pulpit that should 'a' been in the blacksmithin' line; for there's some sense in thumpin' on an anvil, but not an artom in hammerin' away at a Bible with a fist as big as a sledge-hammer."

Nicholas approached his instrument within six inches of Andrew's passive head, when it became fixed, and the last idea appeared to absorb him quite.

"When I've seen sich fists comin' down spiteful on the Word o' God, I've thought to myself that the same force might 'a' driven a spade into the sile, and made it ready for a pertater or a grain o' corn to grow. It's a queer, queer world!"

Nicholas stopped, then said:

"Hold still, Jeanjean! If you stir so much as the thickness of a hair, you sha'n't sing the 'Trapper's Darter' no more. Remember Nanny, don't ye, Andrew?"

"Ma jolie Ninon!" muttered Jeanjean.

"Jes' so!" quoth Nicholas, carefully separating the half-grauated lips of the wound, and examining it with scrupulous nicety. "The fact is, Andrew, they've jest about made an idiot of ye, which is nigh the muchness of a fool; and fools, my lad, a'n't of no great vally in this world. You'd better go under, and done with it, than be a fool. You can't have Nanny, if you're a fool. So don't wince!"

The unfortunate Jeanjean turned his eyes upon Nick with singular earnestness. The light of the torch glowed upon his face, imparting to its gravity and fixedness a strange intensity.

The hand that held the pocket-knife went steadily down, and the point of the instrument rested in the fracture.

Pathaway thought: "How many times those unshaking fingers have pulled the deadly trigger."

A slight moan from Jeanjean told that he suffered.

"You may groan, Andrew; but if you stir, good-bye to Nanny!"

Nick worked quietly, taking out two or three splinters of bone, pausing once, only to say: "Whatever comes o' this, colonel, say nothin' about it that can reach the p'ison newspapers. Hold the torch a little closter."

Pathaway, now thoroughly interested in the operation, beheld Nick's skillful surgery with surprise. He raised the depressed bone; a portion of the brain exuded, which Nick detached.

"Twill do no harm," he muttered. "Knowed a trapper to lose an ounce 'thout hurtin' him. There, lad, I allow I've done ye good."

"His expression changes!" exclaimed Pathaway.

"A trifle, a trifle; but it'll be more apperient by-and-by. He must sleep, and if I a'n't mistaken, he'll wake with his senses about him. If he's keeful, and meets with no drawback, the bone will soon knit, I allow."

"I confess I trembled when you began; but my faith is now strong in your success. You have a wonderful hand at everything," said Pathaway, apologetically.

"There was a nat'ral bone-setter in our family, who used to pull all his bones out o' jint jest to show what he could do, and whip 'em in ag'in in a minute. At last, howsomever, unfortunately, he carried his experiments too far; for unjintin' his neck, one day, he wasn't able to set it ag'in. Lead Andrew in, colonel, and wake him, arter he's slept two or three hours. I've got business with Ingin Joe; so good-night."

Nick repeated his "Good-night" earnestly, then hastened to the rocks where he was to meet the young Indian.

CHAPTER XXX.

MADGE.

Pathaway disposed of Jeanjean in the manner indicated by Nick, remaining by him till he had fallen into a heavy sleep. He then looked for Sebastian, but could not find him. Alarmed by his disappearance, he questioned Portneuf, from whom he derived no information. He commenced a diligent search among the ruins, but without success. Believing it possible that he had followed Nick, he descended toward Trapper Valley so far as he thought compatible with safety; not his own, but that of the party. He retraced his steps, much perplexed, and was discussing the subject with Portneuf, when the Shoshoné appeared. The chief was not alone; a young Indian girl walked beside him, whose advance Pathaway beheld with increasing curiosity. She was clad after the manner of her people; but her garments were of stuffs richer and finer than are usually obtained by the natives. She drew near slowly, and with averted eyes.

"Where is Sebastian?" asked Pathaway, turning from a brief scrutiny of this new and interesting addition to the party, to the Shoshoné.

"Ask me where is last night's dew or yesterday's rain," answered Multnomah.

Pathaway stirred the brands of the not yet extinguished fire, causing them to emit a fitful flame, which threw a glare upon the girl's face. The features were classically regular, and, despite their tawny tinge, handsome; and not only beautiful, but familiar.

"Sebastian!" exclaimed the young man.

"But Sebastian no more," answered the girl, blushing. "I trust, sir—I hope that you will not misconstrue—" she stammered.

"No apologies, I beg! I will misconstrue nothing. Your conduct shall be leniently judged by me," replied Pathaway, not without embarrassment.

The chief walked away, and left them together.

"Come nearer the light," added Pathaway.

The girl obeyed, with a smile and a blush.

"Is this indeed Indian blood that colors your hands and your cheeks?" he asked, nervously taking one of her hands.

ously taking one of her hands.

"Madge, the half-breed girl, is of the same parentage as the boy Sebastian. What else could you expect, sir?"

"God only knows!" exclaimed Pathaway, dropping her hand, with a disappointment so evident that it could not be concealed.

"I think Nicholas informed you that my mother was a French woman, and my father of mixed blood?"

"Confound the mixed blood!" muttered Pathaway.

"It appears to be very much confounded," said Madge, overhearing the remark.

"Let me assure you," said Pathaway, "that I have not been so blind as you may have imagined, in regard to your sex."

"Nor I so blind in regard to your suspicions. I noted their commencement, and have watched their development from time to time. You know not what I have suffered; such shame, such embarrassment, such humiliation! I return to the proper garb of my sex with indescribable relief."

"Has not my deportment been considerate and gentle? Have I not, at least of late, treated you with marked respect?" interrogated Pathaway, with a slight tinge of remorse.

"I do not complain. If at first a smile of contempt appeared upon your lips, it afterward gave place to compassion. But we had best not recall those matters to-night."

"I have curiosity as well as woman," said Pathaway, pleasantly; "I am anxious to hear your history."

He looked earnestly at the beautiful face of Madge.

"Histories," she replied, "do not read well till we are dead. Nick Whiffles is my historian. Honest Nick! I fear he will be betrayed by that Indian boy. Tell me, Mr. Pathaway, do you think we are safe? Will not the mountain outlaws and their savage allies discover our hiding-place? Ought this fire to blaze here?"

"We are so shut up by rocky columns and walls, that I apprehend little danger of discovery," replied Pathaway, reflectively. "And yet," he resumed, "I cannot conceal from you that our enemies are cunning, nor deny the fact that the pursuit will be long and skillfully conducted. But since you are with us, your sex will and shall stimulate us to the greatest efforts for your protection. I will not, I cannot forget that wound which you bear for me. Believe me, my gratitude is genuine and deep. You have suffered, and suffered patiently; you have borne the pain of your wound and the hardships of our flight without murmuring. Your heroism and fortitude call forth my warmest admiration. I entreat of you to give me a place among those you call friends. Honor me with but half the confidence you bestow upon Nicholas, the trapper, and I shall indeed esteem myself happy!"

Pathaway spoke with fervor; a glow of enthusiasm suffused his face. The girl Madge changed color, manifesting that soft confusion that woman feels when secretly pleased; but whom pride and maidenly reserve admonish to conceal the emotion.

"Friends, I trust we shall ever be," she answered; "but Nicholas—ah, I have known Nicholas a long time!"

It would have been difficult to explain why, but this remark gave the gray hunter pain. He envied Nick the confidence of the singular being beside him. He felt annoyed that he could not fill the same place in her thoughts, and have the same right to care for and protect her. While these emotions were upon him, the Shoshoné hastily came up, extinguished the fire and scattered the brands.

"Is there danger?" asked Pathaway, quickly.

"Danger," responded the chief, "is never distant. The pale-faces and the red walk much to-night. The ear of the Shoshoné has been to the ground, and heard the sound of feet far up the side of the mountain."

"Are your ears, then, so acute? I have heard nothing."

"The hunter has heard too much," returned Multnomah, looking at Madge. "He has heard the notes of the singing-bird, and he loves to listen."

"What is it, Shoshoné? Which way lies the danger?"

"It is there," said the chief, pointing to the north-west. "The white trappers are going down to the valley, perhaps, and will cross our trail on the way."

"It will be fortunate for us if Seven-Plumes is not with them, for his eyes are quick to find a trail."

Multnomah made a gesture for Madge to screen herself behind a column, which she did, and the chief moved off and was soon out of sight. Pathaway was in the act of turning to address her, when a slight noise, like that produced by cocking a pistol, caused him to pause and look suspiciously into the darkness. A sharp report quickly followed. Pathaway staggered, but did not fall.

"You are uninjured. Thank God!" exclaimed Madge.

"Yes," replied the hunter, "I believe I am unhurt."

He pointed to a perforation in his frock.

"It passed through your garments; but," she added, turning pale with alarm, "where is the bullet? I did not hear it strike the rock behind you!"

Pathaway unbuttoned his frock, and with a smile, drew from beneath it a package. He held up before her a mass of dark hair, from which a bullet dropped.

"Curls have often proved fatal," he said, "to men's hearts; but these, as you see, have saved mine."

For a moment, Madge was too much agitated to speak; she contemplated the raven tresses with clasped hands and parted lips.

"Tell me," she cried, when she could command her voice—then suddenly checked herself, and stood silently gazing at Pathaway.

"Be calm; that danger, at least, is passed. I can say that I have been saved by a woman's tresses."

"You are not sheltered; another shot may prove more hurtful. Step behind a column; it will shield you from the unseen marksman," she said, with a beseeching look.

"Not only saved by a woman's curls, but by a woman's arms," added the hunter, thoughtfully; "and that arm," he continued, "yours. But I lose time in idle talk when I should be looking for the foe. Hasten to our covert, Madge, in the mimic castle, and I'll soon bring you word how matters stand."

Pathaway glanced toward the suspicious quarter with hawk-like intensity—then, stooping and grasping his rifle firmly, stole noiselessly from the spot.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE RESTORATION—THE MIDNIGHT STRIFE.

Madge entered the rocky cavern, for in truth it was little else. The moonlight crept dimly in through the gaping crevices. Andrew Jeanjean was sleeping. She stood beside him, listening anxiously to every sound without. His features, imperfectly revealed by the faint nocturnal beams, were paler than they were wont; but she noticed that they changed occasionally, responsive, doubtless, to his varying dreams. Every moment was fraught with suspense, and the time to Madge was dimly long.

She missed Nick, whose voice had become so familiar, and was ever so full of friendliness. During the last few hours there had been as great a change in her feelings as in her garb. She was no longer Sebastian Delaunay, obliged to act an unnatural character, and one entirely opposed to her innate delicacy. There had been a constant struggle in her bosom, which increased in a tenfold degree after meeting the gray hunter. To Nick she had grown accustomed; for he, being in her secret, the need of constant effort and watchfulness was less urgent. It was after her acquaintance with Pathaway had begun, that the embarrassment of her false position became really painful. Every moment she had feared discovery, and many times was in doubt whether he had not already divined the secret of her sex. All this was past—except the maidenly shame of its recollection. She had returned to the garb worn by her sex, and though differing from that of her civilized sisters, it was well adapted to life in the wilderness.

It was an inexpressible relief not to feel compelled to simulate masculine manners. Had danger been more distant, her feelings of relief would have been more marked and complete; but anxiety for her friends and defenders marred the pleasure of the metamorphosis. She expected to hear every instant the stealthy tread of Indians, or those whose presence she dreaded as much.

A single rifle-shot rang through the rocks. Andrew Jeanjean started up, yawned, opened his drowsy eyes, stared at Madge, then glanced wonderingly around him. The young woman

observed him in silence, awaiting with interest the result of Nick's surgery.

"Who are you?" he asked, slowly. "Where—where am I? Ah! I must have fallen asleep on the way! I have had a long walk, but I don't remember lying down. Where are my peltries, I wonder?"

"What is the last thing you remember?" Madge asked.

With a bewildered air, Andrew arose, and looked at the interrogator, who repeated her question.

"The last thing I remember?" reiterated Jeanjean, reflectively. "I recollect starting from the trapping-grounds, and having my horse stolen as I camped at night. Let me see—then I threw my peltries across my shoulders, and came as far as here; that is, I reached a gulch or cañon, which must be in this vicinity. Then—then"—Andrew put his hand to his brow—"then—everything seems to leave off abruptly. I have had darkness and confused dreams."

"Have you no consciousness of a shock, a sudden pain, the report of a gun, a fall?" asked Madge.

"All is blank!" replied Andrew, hopelessly.

"To be brief, you were beset by ruffians, robbed, and left for dead, and owe your preservation to a brave man who witnessed the outrage."

"How long ago was that?" inquired Jeanjean.

"More than a week," answered Madge.

"It seems scarcely possible," said Jeanjean.

"Your wound was of the head," continued Madge. "But this is no time for details. We are in danger—pursued by enemies upon whose ears the cries of mercy are lost."

"I cannot realize this!" exclaimed Andrew, with emphasis. "How can one lose a week of life, yet awake to the conscious world strong, and to all appearance healthy?"

Jeanjean passed his hand dubiously over his head, wincing when he touched the wound.

"All this is possible," he added, "though to me most dreamlike and improbable. I have had a concussion of the brain—a fracture of the skull, or an injury of that nature, doubtless."

The French voyageur joined them.

"Where is Pathaway? Where is the Shoshoné?" he asked, hastily. "We will be beset by enemies, and we shall be killed if we don't fight ver' much."

Andrew heard the sound of his voice, and remembered the father of Ninon.

"Portneuf!" he cried, seizing his hand.

"What is this I shall hear? His senses is come back. This is astonish! This one grand surprise!"

"I am very faint—I am dizzy! In a moment I shall be calm. There—there—I am quite restored. Tell me of Ninon?"

He looked earnestly at the voyageur.

"*Ma jolie Ninon!*" exclaimed Portneuf, sorrowfully.

"What has happened to Ninon?"

"Be discreet!" whispered Madge.

"*Mon Dieu!* I will not tell you what shall happen to her. They take her away—the what you call him—robbers."

"Robbers? Ninon?" said Andrew, with a start.

"You are imprudent! I fear the shock of this announcement will prove too much for his newly-restored reason," said Madge, in a low voice, to the voyageur.

"My heart so full, so ver' full!" answered Portneuf, wringing his hands.

"We have reason to suppose," added Madge, "that Ninon is at Trapper Valley, whither she has been carried by some lawless free trappers."

"The mountain outlaws!" exclaimed Jeanjean, with strong emotion. "You tell me, girl," he continued, fixing his eyes upon Madge, "that Ninon is in the hands of robbers and assassins, and expect me to hear you with calmness. Where are my arms? Let me fly to her rescue!"

"Listen, Jeanjean! We are at this moment exposed to deadly peril. Pathaway and the Shoshoné are seeking our foes alone, and in the darkness; while the old trapper, Nick Whiffles, whose name you may have heard, is making a hazardous attempt to save Ninon," said Madge, hurriedly.

"Then my duty is here," responded Andrew, restraining his feelings. "Give me a weapon, Portneuf."

"Nicholas has kept your arms carefully; they lie there by the rocks," said Madge.

"I trust my wound has not deprived me of

strength and cunning," responded Andrew; and seizing his weapons, and admonishing the girl to remain, rushed forth with the voyageur. Madge felt it impossible to stay there quietly. Taking the bow and quiver of arrows which had been her companions for many months, she left her covert, and soon stood on the spot where she had parted from the gray hunter. No one was in sight. Mimic City stretched out around her, toward every point of compass, like a scene of enchantment. It was a grim and frowning solitude, that might be broken at any moment by the gliding footsteps or piercing yells of savage foemen. Shaft, column, and wall might conceal miscreants, from whom she shrank with indescribable dread. She glanced timidly this way and that, then advanced with noiseless steps toward the point where Pathaway had disappeared. She heard sounds toward the Valley, which grew more distinct as she proceeded. Springing upon a tottering wall, she gazed down the mountain-side and saw, by the aid of the moonlight, two persons struggling together on a platform of rock hanging over a precipice of a hundred feet. Her instincts assured her that one was Pathaway. She sprang toward the combatants like a chamois, not stopping to ask what assistance she should render or what danger she incurred. She was soon near enough to perceive that the hunter was engaged in a hand-to-hand encounter with an Indian of extraordinary proportions, whose strength and liveness seemed in keeping with his size. Terror paralyzed her person when she discovered that each was endeavoring to throw the other from the ledge into the abyss. The bow nearly dropped from her hand, while her respiration grew thick and gasping. Her lips were parted and pale, the upper portion of her body thrown forward, her whole person statue-like and intent. Aid she could not render, had fortitude and presence of mind permitted; for the evolutions of the combatants were so rapid, that a blow aimed at one might have taken effect upon the other.

The savage concentrated his powers for a final effort. She saw the convulsive quivering of his muscles while his form was quiescent an instant in the act. He drew the hunter along in his grasp; both trembled on the verge of the dizzy height.

Madge moaned in her horror of the dreaded catastrophe. This feeble expression of terror reached the ears of Pathaway, and in that fearful pause on the brink he caught sight of the slight figure of Madge. New energy braced his nerves; he felt a sudden access of strength in his muscles. Disengaging his right hand with a force that would have torn it from his shoulder else, he grasped his agile antagonist by the throat, closing his fingers with the rigor of steel. A moment he held him palpitating and writhing, while portions of the persons of both hung over the chasm; then the great limbs of the Indian quivered and lost their terrible power. Pathaway recovered himself, lifted his swarthy foe, and hurled him down the abyss. The victor sank panting upon the rock.

Madge fell on her knees in a gratitude that was voiceless and deep. She was in this attitude when Captain Dick and the chief, Seven-Plumes, appeared a few yards up the mountain, running toward the spot where the hunter was lying. A warning cry from her lips caused him to spring to his feet. She then heard the whoop of the Shoshoné, and saw Multnomah leaping like a deer to meet the new-comers. While bewildered with the rapidity of these developments, some one touched her, and turning her head, she beheld Indian Joe.

"No stay here; go with Joe. Much blood here; pretty squaw no like blood," he said.

He took her by the hand, and she mechanically allowed him to lead her away. As she went, she saw other figures moving to and fro, and heard the clash of steel.

"Where is uncle Nick?" she asked, presently, stopping.

Joe did not at once answer.

"White trapper up yonder," he replied anon. "He waits for the boy-woman."

Madge thought there was bitterness in the tones of the young Indian, but without doubting his good faith, followed on, momentarily expecting to greet the familiar face of the trapper. She passed the spot where they had camped.

The report of firearms and the shouts of combatants rang in her ears, filling her with

painful apprehensions for the safety of her friends. She pictured to herself the gray hunter exhausted by his recent fearful trial, engaged with fresh enemies, sorely pressed, and in need of succor. "If Nick were there," she murmured. "Hasten, Joe; the brave trapper is needed. His voice and his arm would work wonders."

"Soon find him. He go back quick. Great Medicine is Doubledark!" responded Joe, quickening his pace and winding among the rocks as if familiar with the way. He struck into a familiar path, Madge continuing to urge him on. The noise of fighting men grew fainter and fainter, and Madge became conscious that she had been guided a long distance, while a distrust of Joe began to give her uneasiness. For a short time she did not speak her doubts, but by-and-by the conviction became so strong that she stopped.

"Joe," she said, "you are deceiving me! Nick Whiffles would not remain so distant when his presence is so much required yonder. The first report of firearms would have aroused him and given the speed of a buffalo to his limbs."

"Come on, woman!" returned Joe, in tones so singularly enunciated, that the fears of Madge were more excited. "Don't stay to talk." Madge noticed a marked deviation in the boy's usual style of address.

"I'll go no farther!" she answered, with firmness.

"Most there. Joe no deceive; tongue straight," replied Joe, returning to his old manner.

"I will return," said Madge, resolutely. She had taken but a few steps backward, when Joe caught her by the wrist, saying imperatively:

"You shall not! Joe says go, and you go!"

"Oh, you've grown authoritative! But I will not tamely submit to your whims."

She attempted to shake him off, but he clung to her like a young wildcat.

"Treacherous boy!" she cried. "Is it thus that you reward my kindness?"

"Reward? Who talks of reward? Your reward is not yet!" exclaimed Joe, in the best of English.

Madge recoiled.

"What do I hear?" she demanded. "What transformation is this? Impostor! traitor!"

"To you, woman, I am both," retorted the youth, with vehemence.

"What injury can I have done you?" interrogated Madge, agitated by surprise and fear.

"The greatest injury that one woman can do another!" cried the other, passionately.

"Woman?" repeated Madge, with increasing amazement.

"Silly creature, not to have discovered it before! Was my disguise, then, so perfect? Was my character so closely simulated? Was Indian Joe so much a boy? Girl, girl, I am Carlóta!"

The white lips of Madge grew whiter; she put out one small hand as if to thrust back something unspeakably shocking, while with the other she covered her eyes.

"Traitor!" she murmured. "So blinded, so deceived, so lost! What is my crime?"

"My heart was never touched—I never loved till I saw him! And you—you presumed to love him!" she answered, with indescribable bitterness. "I penetrated your disguise," she went on. "I saw you start and change color when I guided him to the trapper's camp. You would have cast yourself into his arms, had you dared—the man whose life I saved—whose existence was forfeit to the lawful lords of the mountains. What a pang, what a stinging, painful pang of jealousy shot through me then! I could have slain you, woman, with my own hand!"

"You have deceived yourself," returned Madge, in a fainting voice.

"'Tis false! I have watched you every moment when he was present. Don't deny what you know is true, but from this hour dismiss him from your thoughts. I have you—I hold you safe. This hand"—she held up a very small hand—"can crush you. It can consign you to a fate more terrible than death."

Carlóta spoke with angry and vindictive energy. Madge felt how fearful is a jealous woman!

"What would you have?" she asked.

"What would I have?" she repeated, fiercely. "I would have you beyond his sight and hearing forever!"

"It is my death that you desire. Be mer-

oiful—"

"Are your senses so disturbed that you can think of softening me?" retorted Carlota, with scathing earnestness.

"I was about to ask the mercy of death without dishonor," answered Madge, with dignity. "If you indeed consider me so much your enemy, so fatally in your way, that knife in your belt thrust into my bosom, which I here offer, will remove me from your path, and secure that silence which is eternal."

Madge parted the fold of her dress, and presented a bosom spotlessly white.

Carlota did not touch the weapon at her side, out partly drew a small dagger from her breast, upon the silver handle of which her fingers trembled convulsively. Her color changed rapidly, alternating from crimson to white. There was a painful conflict within.

"Let no false emotion of pity prevent you from striking," said Madge, earnestly. "If you knew the horror I have of yonder Valley and the miscreants that infest it, I am sure you would mercifully put an end to my suspense."

Carlota slowly replaced the dagger, pressed her hands upon her heart and her face, then leaned against a rock, trembling in every limb. While both stood mute and agitated with varying emotions, Dick Hendricks appeared in the mountain-path to fill up the picture.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE ESCAPE—THE CAVERN.

The dogs had disappeared about an hour after the departure of Nick, nor had Madge seen them since. She now thought of the faithful creatures, and wished they were near to save her. She looked furtively around in the hope of seeing them, and would have called them, had she been able to control her voice.

Hendricks stared a moment at her, and Carlota then sat down upon a stone like one exhausted. Carlota perceived that blood was flowing from the sleeve of his hunting-shirt, and hastened to his side.

"You are hurt!" she exclaimed.

"Not much, but faint from loss of blood," replied Hendricks.

Carlota began to search for the wound; and while she was bending over him, Madge conceived the idea of escape. The thought no sooner crossed her mind than she put it in practice. As Hendricks and Carlota were above her, cutting off her return, she sprang down a little path toward the Valley with extraordinary swiftness. She did not turn to see if she were pursued, but flew onward with feet that scarcely touched the ground. Several times she thought she heard the voice of Carlota and the sound of pursuit; but this incited her to greater exertion. In the perturbation of flight, she did not remember that she was descending to Trapper Valley, nor did that truth force itself upon her till she saw the dismal portals of Devil's Gate. The unwelcome sight caused her to pause. The dark mouth of the tunnel, the towering columns of basalt, the jagged rocks, the weird effect of the darkness upon all, conspired to fill her with terror. But it was no time for hesitation or delay. She began to reason and think connectedly. Shuddering, she hurried past the gloomy entrance to the Valley, and commenced the ascent on the opposite side, which was far less steep and more accessible. The hope of escape was now really strong in the breast of Madge. In the outset, the effort was but a wild experiment, with scarcely probabilities enough to give it the prestige of success. She beheld the space rapidly widening between her and the Valley with feelings of expectation that cannot well be imagined. Her frame was too delicate, however, to endure long this violent exercise. By the time she reached the summit of the ascent, her speed was much abated, and her panting respiration and trembling limbs warned her that her physical powers had been severely taxed, and called imperatively for rest. She sank upon a grassy knoll, and listening for the sound of pursuing feet, heard the tumultuous beatings of her own heart. Again and again she held her breath, and turned her ear to the Valley, to be as often startled by imaginary alarms and chance interruptions of the prevailing silence.

She dared not remain long inactive; but taking, as near as she could judge, the direction of Nick's hut, went forward with more calmness, though with less speed. She thought not of wild beasts, or of the loneliness, and solitude, and darkness, but of Carlota, Hendricks, and the dreaded Valley. 'Tis true that she

had fears for Nick, and regretted that she had not had sufficient presence of mind to ask Carlota concerning him. That she had betrayed him, she had no doubt. This reflection was fraught with pain, which even her own forlorn condition could not banish nor swallow up in its greater misery. She saw landmarks that were familiar, and a little before morning reached Nick's deserted camp. She tottered in, and completely exhausted, was glad to cast herself upon its couch of evergreens.

The sun had performed part of his diurnal journey when she awoke. How familiar the spot looked! How many memories it recalled—some pleasant, others quite the reverse! Here she had been the boy Sebastian Delaunay, acting a part repugnant to her nature. She recalled numberless trifling incidents of her short sojourn at the camp. It was near it that she had received the wound aimed at Pathaway, and which, in the excitement of the last few hours, had been entirely forgotten by her; but the arm, now swollen and inflamed by violent exercise, reminded her of the injury.

What was she now to do? Could she be long safe there? Would not Carlota's vengeance pursue her? If she fled, which way should she fly? These and a thousand other queries pressed upon her at once. Determined to act like a reasonable being, and to employ every rational means of preservation, she refreshed herself with food that had been left there at the time of their flight. Having thus, as in duty bound, attended to the wants of nature, she resolved to seek a more secure retreat, and trust her final rescue to her friends and Providence. She recollected that in one of her rambles she had discovered a small cave, the entrance to which was nearly concealed by bushes, and immediately went to search for it. Having found it, she conveyed to it such useful articles as had been left at the camp—among which were her own scarlet blanket, a hatchet, a carbine, ammunition, and several other articles, all of which had been hidden under some boughs. The food, consisting of dried buffalo tongues and slices of the meat prepared in a similar manner, she also carefully conveyed to her hiding-place.

The cave was situated in a wood, within sight of the camp—so that, standing in its entrance, screened by its curtain of shrubbery, she could see any one who should approach it. At first, the darkness within was almost intolerable, but her eyes soon became accustomed to it; and by removing as much of the foliage as seemed superfluous, she let in not only additional light, but purer air. Having thus provided for her safety according to the dictates of judgment and the limited means circumstances allowed her, she felt that she could do no more, and awaited anxiously the developments of time.

The sun had passed the meridian by the time these simple preparations were completed. She was felicitating herself upon her escape, when she saw some one advancing toward the camp, and thought at first it might be Nick or Pathaway; but it proved to be Bill Brace. He neared the camp in a stealthy manner, looked in, seemed disappointed, then searched for a trail. Several times he came very near the spot where Madge was concealed, but finally went away, to her great relief. The remainder of the day and the ensuing night passed without further incident. Early in the morning, however, Bill Brace and Carlota—the latter still dressed as Indian Joe—appeared.

Madge began to tremble—for Bill Brace was leading the dog Smuggler by a string. There was now real cause for alarm. They would unleash the dog; impelled by affection, he would take her trail and come to her directly. There could be no doubt—the catastrophe was sure and at hand. Madge was filled with nervous horror. Of what avail was her escape from Carlota! It was only postponing her fate—not averting it. She gazed with palpitating heart from her covert. She saw Carlota go into the camp, come out again, glance searchingly from point to point, taking in the surrounding scenery with a sweeping look of her quick eyes.

She made a motion to Brace, who slipped the cord from Smuggler's neck. Feeling himself at liberty, the animal ran into his master's camp, smelt of the boughs where Madge had slept, sprang out with his nose to the ground, and ran toward the trees. Carlota as well as Madge watched his movements with intense

interest. Smuggler was in the timber in a moment, and as quickly disappeared.

"Where is he?" asked Carlota.

"In the bushes," said Brace.

"Let us follow faster; we shall lose sight of him altogether," added Carlota.

"We've lost sight of him now, but he'll turn up ag'in soon, I reckon," replied Brace, looking about him with evident perplexity.

"Slow-footed idiot!" cried the girl; "if your feet were half as fast as your tongue, you would find him. He was on her trail, I am sure."

"That may be true; but where's the critter now?"

Brace stopped close to the cavern.

"Dogs don't git out o'sight in an onnatural way, do they? Can't sink down into the airth, nor go up into the air, can they?"

Brace stared stupidly at Carlota.

"You have not half the sagacity of the dog, though you may be quite as much of a brute," retorted Carlota, angrily. "Beat every bush—look behind every rock and tree. We shall find both dog and girl in some hole or covert."

While Carlota was speaking, she sprang forward and stood at the entrance of the cave. Brace, meantime, ran about like one half-distracted, for he dreaded the anger of Carlota. "The critter dodged us by turnin' on his track, or round a rock; he may be a mile from here by this time."

"Brace, you have strength, but not half the cunning of a woman. Look here! What's this?"

Brace hurried to her; she had parted the bushes, and was pointing downward.

"You'll find the dog and the one we seek in there," she added. Then, authoritatively: "Go in, Brace, and bring them out."

"I'll look in, first," replied the ruffian. "It's ruther dark; it may be a wolf's den, for aught I know. I'm not afeard of an enemy that I can see, but I don't like to be too venturesome in the dark."

Brace thrust his burly head into the opening, but could see nothing but blackness.

"In, I tell you!" commanded Carlota, impatiently.

"The dog will tear me," said Brace, sullenly.

"What does it matter? Your flesh will heal again. 'Tisn't so tender and delicate that you need to take such good care of it."

Brace slowly pushed his head and shoulders into the darkness. A growl admonished him to forbear.

"What did I tell you?" cried Carlota, triumphantly. "She is there; I knew it."

"I can see the dog's eyes; they blaze like coals!"

"Fool! they are not the dog's—they are her's; they are fatally bright!" said Carlota, wildly.

"Don't I know a gal's eyes from a dog's?" retorted Brace, sharply. "Give me my rifle; I'll shoot the critter."

Carlota pushed the rifle with her foot, so he could reach it, then suddenly seized his arm.

"Hold! I am afraid you will make a mistake, and rob me of my triumph. Take away your bristly head, and let me look."

Madge sat shivering in the remotest limit of the cavern, but instinctively looked up when Carlota looked in. The eyes of the latter seemed to conquer the darkness, for she exclaimed:

"Come forth, girl, come forth! I am here—Carlota is here. Yield, if you would save the life of your faithful dog; be obstinate, and I will order Brace to shoot him."

"Have you no pity—no remorse?" cried Madge.

"For you, none; for the man I love, a world of both!" responded Carlota.

"It's best to make an end o' the dog, anyway," said Brace, in whose memory was treasured a former insult.

"Order away your ruffian, and I will obey you," said Madge, with dignity. "I feel that resistance to my fate is vain; but in common humanity, I ask you to spare the dog."

"Bill Brace, harm a hair of the dog, and I'll hold your life of less value than his!" said Carlota, imperiously, to her cringing confederate.

Madge came out, followed by Smuggler—who wished to make an assault upon Brace, who stood with his rifle cocked, ready for such a demonstration; but, from feelings of mercy to the dog, Madge restrained him.

"Woman! Carlota! I am in your power. Dispose of me as you will; but take me not to yonder Valley."

The eyes of the two girls met with an intensity of emotion on the part of each—hatred, jealousy, and revenge on the one hand; wonder, consternation, and fear on the other. Both were formed fair by Nature, and both silently admitted the fact.

"Lead on!" said Carlóta to Brace.

The latter shook his head sullenly, and replied:

"I won't trust my back to the dog, nowadays. As soon's I turn, the chances are two to one that he'll spring to my shoulders, and put his teeth into the back of my neck. I know the natur' o' Nick Whiffles' dogs. This one isn't so savage as t'other; but he's l'arnin' his tricks right fast. No, no, miss! I ain't to be tore to pieces by quadrupids."

"Send him away!" said Carlóta, sharply, to Madge.

"It grieves me to part with him," she answered, looking hesitatingly from Brace to Smuggler, as if measuring the chances of a combat between them.

The eyes of the dog followed those of his mistress; he was evidently ready to try his strength at her bidding.

"He's a fine brute; but you must kill him, Brace," added Carlóta, after a moment's reflection.

"Go, Smuggler, go!" said Madge—"go back to your master."

Smuggler looked at her wistfully, as if to divine her purpose by her features. It was not until she had repeated her command in a more imperative voice that he obeyed, and then reluctantly—halting, now and then, to see if the order would not be revoked.

"Now that you are relieved of the animal, go on," said Carlóta.

The mountain robber shouldered his rifle, and moved toward the east. Carlóta and Madge followed him.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SEVEN-PLUMES.

The rays of the sun gleamed brightly on the varied scenery. The summits of the mountain-ranges were tipped with crimson and gold. The long, trembling beams of light gilded the branches of the trees, darted down into the valleys, flickered against the broad surfaces of the rocks, and painted fantastic pictures upon lake and stream. But the charms of Nature were lost upon Madge. A sense of personal peril—a vague apprehension—outweighed all other considerations. Occasionally, Carlóta's eyes kindled as she glanced around her; but if she found room in her agitated breast for the beautiful, she did not express the sentiment. Madge watched for some softening of her expression; but the feelings that guided her movements were too strong to yield so readily.

Madge did not waste words in useless appeals; but followed her silently. She noticed that Brace kept along the margin of the valley, following its general course. Sometimes, the way was exceedingly rough, and her feet were wounded upon the sharp stones; but the girl of the mountains, more used to such traveling, sprang along after Brace with lightness and agility. If she unconsciously gained upon Madge, and left her behind, she paused for her to come up—and once helped her across a chasm, but dropped her hand suddenly, as if the contact wounded her.

They reached a spot where the valley fell off precipitously. Madge could look down many feet upon the tops of stunted trees, sterile crags, ledges of red sandstone, and shattered columns of basalt. Carlóta paused to rest. Madge was glad to recline beneath the shade of a cottonwood.

It was past noon. Brace stood on the verge of a precipice, leaning upon his rifle, and looking at the scenery beneath. His face was more serious than usual. Possibly a shadow of the coming event had fallen within the circle of his consciousness, thrilling him with a vague fear. Madge saw a figure spring from the background and pause on the brink of the abyss. So sudden and unexpected was the intrusion, that for an instant she was not aware that Brace had disappeared. Carlóta uttered an exclamation of surprise. On the spot where the outlaw was last seen stood a tall and painted form, gazing at the two girls with a grim, exultant look.

Although Brace had ever been an object of abhorrence to Madge, she could not repress a chill of horror at his fate. The Indian had hurled him down the precipice.

"Treachery! treachery!" cried Carlóta.

"Redskin, what have you done?"

"Pushed him over; he fall great ways—kill him dead! White squaws go with Seven-Plumes. Wigwam ten, eleven, twenty miles off," answered the Indian, calmly.

"Seven-Plumes has deceived Dick Hendricks. How can he tell him a straight story, when he meets him? He cannot; his tongue will stammer like a squaw's," answered Carlóta, with wonderful self-possession.

"The Bear"—Seven-Plumes pointed down the abyss—"had a bad tongue; he no speak truth; he lie to Seven-Plumes, the chief of the Blackfeet. He say, he give—he no give. Now he no lie no more."

"The warriors of Seven-Plumes will bleed for this! The white chief of the Valley will cause his young men to fall like leaves when the trees are shaken by the wind in the autumn of the year," responded Carlóta, with a menacing gesture.

"Seven-Plumes no care for Cap'n Dick! He want one, two squaw; he find one, two squaw—he take 'em. He fight for Cap'n Dick, too; but Cap'n Dick he no give him 'nough powder, and lead and hatchet."

"I will see that you have all that he agreed to give you," replied Carlóta, thinking diplomacy the best policy.

"No want hatchet and powder now; want squaw; got squaw—keep him!"

Carlóta struggled to restrain her indignation and disappointment. Fear of captivity did not operate so strongly upon her as the thwarting of her plans.

"Do you hear what this redskin says?" she demanded, almost fiercely of Madge: "he talks of his wigwam and squaws."

"It is but a change of masters. I hail this new captivity with different emotions from you. Thralldom with savages cannot be so dreadful as yonder valley and you," replied Madge.

"True, I forgot; I can hope nothing from you. But the wife of a chief! 'Tis monstrous!—Seven-Plumes, name the reward that you demand for our freedom. How many rifles, how many hatchets and knives, how many pounds of powder, how much red stuff for your favorite squaws?"

The Indian knit his painted brows. His wild and intractable nature could not brook contradiction. He had enjoyed savage freedom from infancy; his will had been law among his people for many summers. Should he submit to the dictum of a squaw?

"Seven-Plumes is a chief. When he speak, the great Blackfoot nation do as he say. If he say, 'Go on the war-path,' to his young men, they go. If he say, 'Wash the war-paint from your faces,' they come into the wigwams with clean skins. If he say, 'Kindle the torture-tires,' they are kindled. If he say to squaw, 'Go to such a lodge and be the wife of such a warrior,' she go. White squaw of the Valley, come with Seven-Plumes." Then to Madge, with eyes that glowed with conscious authority, "Pale-face girl with the painted skin, git up and follow the chief of the Blackfoot nation."

There were imperiousness and genuine autocratic dignity in the manner of the red-man. The wild, wayward girl of the Valley changed color and felt her danger, realizing, for the first time, that there were natures as strong and unbending as her own.

"Chief," she said, after a little silence, skillfully and artfully modulating her voice to its most persuasive notes, "reflect that we are but girls, children, almost, while you are a man and a warrior, with a heart of iron and an arm of steel. You are strong; we are weak; the weak look to the strong for protection. The strong ought to be magnanimous. A brave man is always generous—a coward always the most abusive of power. Do you hear me, chief of the Blackfeet?"

The smile that illuminated the swarthy visage of the Indian was both wily and exultant. His rude and native pride was flattered, too.

"It is well-spoken for a squaw! I have listened to the voices of many, but of few whose talk was so cunning. Seven-Plumes is glad you speak so well. You make him want you more to keep his lodge and to welcome him when he returns from the successful trail. He kill deer with his own hands; he kill buffalo; he catch beaver and otter; he lay the choicest meat and the best peltries at the feet of the white squaw."

Tears of vexation, burning, bitter tears rolled scorching down Carlóta's cheeks. She

pressed the handle of the dagger in her bosom, glanced at her own small hand and arm, then at the herculean proportions of the chief. He observed her with the eyes of an eagle, and smiled with satisfaction at the strength of her spirit. Before, she was but a pebble; now, she was a diamond.

Seven-Plumes pointed proudly to the north-east.

"Yonder," said he, "are the Saskatchewan prairies, and the best hunting-grounds of the Blackfoot. Many warriors will welcome the return of the chief. Come!"

Madge was already on her feet, and Carlóta reluctantly arose. She glanced toward the abyss, then at the mountains, the hills, the sales, the stretches of timber with which she had been familiar, then followed Seven-Plumes with reluctant feet.

"Nothing happens according to our expectations," she muttered. "All things change. We are blown to and fro about the world like a waif of thistle-down. Even our triumph is short-lived and our revenge imperfect. Woman—they call you Sebastian—you exult in my disappointment."

"I am grateful for any change that takes me from your hand. Exultation over one like you I do not, cannot feel. I experience emotions of pity in seeing one so young, so gifted and fair, so lost, so wicked, so depraved by bad companionship."

"Oh, you look down upon Carlóta of the mountains with lofty compassion, but I do not thank you. Your pity adds another drop to my resentment. If you exhibit these qualities to me, how much more pains have you taken to display them to the hunter in gray. And that wound! How I hate you for that wound!"

"This is no time to indulge in such feelings. We are entering upon a captivity that may be long and dangerous; for aught we know, life-long. We may drag out years of miserable servitude; or, if we rebel, find a quicker, though painful release by the fagot and lighted pile. As for this wound, he who gave it has gone to his reward; he lies at the bottom of yonder abyss. The birds will hover over the spot before to-morrow, and the wolves will bicker with each other for his bones. Let his fate show you the end of villainy. This poor arm, it would seem, saved a life that is dear to you; rather thank me for the office, than bring it against me as a crime."

"Prosy and inane moralizer! I detest female sermonizers! I'd rather hear behind me the long gallop of the wolf, than the voice of a canting woman. For the brute who lies mangled in the valley, I have few tears. His fall from the cliff has perhaps saved him a fall from the scaffold," answered Carlóta.

"But Nick Whiffles—honest Nick! I have feared—I yet shrink from asking concerning him?" said Madge, anxiously.

Carlóta stopped on the instant. Something like consternation appeared upon her face.

"I had forgotten him—I had really forgotten him!" she said, as if speaking to herself.

"Where did you leave him?" continued Madge, the manner of Carlóta increasing her apprehensions.

"Where did I leave him?" repeated the girl, with lips that paled in spite of her firmness. "Yes, that is the question—where? I'll tell you: In a dungeon of solid rock! No one knows where he is but myself; no one will carry him food; he will starve!"

"Infamous!" cried Madge, indignantly. "Poor Nick! This makes me miserable, indeed."

"I did not intend this," added Carlóta, thoughtfully. "I expected to have seen him long ago, but this treacherous Blackfoot has thwarted my plans. The trapper was hard on me while I was Indian Joe, and his suspicions were not ill-founded; but even his severity was not without a touch of good-nature. Yet the man Doubledark is dangerous. He has been watching us, and the mountaineers like not to be looked after too closely."

"Squaw he talk too much; he talk twice where he walk but once," said the Blackfoot, with a scowl of displeasure.

The captives went on, but the feet of Madge had grown heavier, while every step, it seemed to her, was taking her from one to whose rescue she ought to fly.

"Yes," added Carlóta, as if speaking to herself, "the people of the Valley consider him an enemy, but Carlóta is not cruel to those who have not injured her. Sebastian—the girl's lip curled contemptuously."

"Call me Madge," said the other.

"I am sorry that the man must perish in such a lingering manner," resumed Carlota.

"But will not some of your people hear his cries?" demanded Madge.

"His voice will fall dead and echoless on the walls of his stony sepulchre. No, girl, no; there is no hope for Nick, the trapper, unless I escape from this Indian."

"God grant, then, that you may escape!" said Madge, with fervor.

"And you?" queried Carlota.

"In thinking of Nick I forgot myself. I think only of the long, dreary hours before him; of wasting hunger; of scorching, agonizing thirst; of the craving, unspeakable tortures of starvation! You know not the ties that bind me to that man; you know not the nature of the debt I owe him; you know not—"

"I know more than I speak," interrupted Carlota.

Madge threw a quick, inquisitive glance at the girl of the mountains.

"What is mysterious to one may be apparent to another. What we cherish as a profound secret may be borne about in the breast of an enemy."

"Unfortunate as I am, driven to these wild solitudes by the force of wayward destiny, I should have found in one of my own sex a sister, and not an enemy," replied Madge, ready to sink under the pressure of accumulated misfortunes.

Carlota did not answer, and the two walked wearily after the chief.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE SEARCH.

Pathaway saw the danger that threatened Madge and himself, and sprang up to meet it. The appearance of the Shoshoné gave him fresh hope and courage. The Indians withstood the first onset with some firmness; but Portneuf and Andrew Jeanjean hearing the firing, and rushing to the assistance of their friends, the red allies of Hendricks gave ground, and were soon safely hidden among the rocks, out of range of a rifle ball. Hendricks, who was conspicuous in the fray, was the last to withdraw from the contest, though not till he had received a wound.

Pathaway hastened to the spot where he had left Madge, but, not finding her, hurried to the Mimic Castle where they had camped. Being equally unsuccessful in that quarter, he believed she had secreted herself somewhere in the vicinity. He ran from covert to covert, seeking her, assured that she could not be far off. This confidence, however, gave place to real alarm as his search grew more extended, and the results no more satisfactory. He called her name. The name of Madge was whispered among the rocks—at first, faintly; more loudly anon. Now, the word arose softly and tenderly; and now, in tones husky with apprehension.

"Madge!"—the name grew dearer as he repeated it. As disappointment after disappointment followed expectation, the maiden grew more important in his estimation. He recalled innumerable things she had said, and remembered as many graces that had been before unappreciated. Her beauty of person was presented in a new and more fascinating form, and he resolved to atone for past neglect, or any want of gallantry that he might have at any time been guilty of, the instant he had an opportunity of doing so.

He felt remorse for his sometimes cruelty to the boy Sebastian. Jeanjean and Portneuf joined in the search; nor did they relax their efforts till the morning sun arose upon the Mimic City.

When the parties gathered around the morning camp-fire to make a breakfast on the flesh of the mountain-sheep that Nick had provided, each had a depressed and anxious expression. The Shoshoné, who had been outlying as a scout and sentinel, joined them while they were eating. He could give them no information of Madge. The non-return of Nick, too, troubled Pathaway. He was well persuaded that he had met with ill luck. Portneuf and Jeanjean were of the same opinion. The restoration of the latter seemed perfect so far as his mental faculties were concerned. He experienced some uneasiness from the wound, but not sufficient to prevent him from wishing to engage at once with Portneuf in an attempt to rescue Ninon and Nick—provided the trapper had fallen into the hands of the outlaws.

Pathaway was familiar enough with surgery to understand that quietude was imperative in such a case, and prevailed on Jeanjean with much difficulty to remain at rest at the camp till the following day. Having carried the point, the gray hunter and the Shoshoné began a systematic search for the trail of Madge; but the hard and sterile mountain-side was unyielding to human feet, and it was seldom that the imprint of even a heavy man's foot could be found. They passed around the camping-ground in circles that consecutively grew in circumference; and it was not until the last reached the Valley that anything resembling the imprint of a woman's foot could be found, and then, only two or three slight impressions on softer soil, that stopped as suddenly as they had begun.

It must be borne in mind, that these movements had to be made with excessive cautiousness, and necessarily consumed much time. On soil less obdurate, and without the drawback of watchful enemies, the task of tracing the trail of Madge would have been comparatively easy. Signs were found near Devil's Gate, near a spring of water which had saturated the earth; and their proximity to the entrance of the Valley made Pathaway fear that she had either unwittingly sought shelter in that dangerous neighborhood, or been conducted there by Hendricks or his men. He wished to explore the gloomy spot; but it was already dark, rendering it impracticable to find or follow a trace so slight and broken. With extreme reluctance, he yielded to the counsel of the Shoshoné, and retraced his steps to the camp at Mimic City to wait for daylight.

He dreamed of Madge more than ever that night. He saw her in peril and distress. Now she was with the outlaws at Trapper Valley, suffering every species of indignity, and now she was in captivity to the red men, momentarily expecting Nick and himself to come to her release. His sleep was so disturbed during the first part of the night, that the Shoshoné was up before him in the morning. It was the hand of the chief that awakened him from his first refreshing slumbers. Portneuf and Jeanjean were already stirring.

"There are four of us," said the latter, "and duties for each. My wound has paralyzed my efforts too long. Portneuf and I have made up our minds what to do: we will rescue Ninon, or perish in the attempt!"

"The feeling is natural and right," said Pathaway. "I need not warn you that the enterprise will be attended with no common danger. The voyageur has doubtless already informed you of the circumstances. The story of his own sufferings and escape give you an insight into the true character of those with whom you have to deal."

"I know all, and will dare all," replied Jeanjean, with energy.

"I will use no arguments to dissuade you from your purpose, for it is laudable; but in your zeal for Ninon, do not forget the man who has twice periled his life for her. Remember Nick Whiffles!"

"God forbid that I should forget him!" exclaimed Jeanjean. "My restored faculties, my consciousness of life and its responsibilities—everything that is dear to man—admonish me to remember him. Who that has known him can cease to think of him with pleasure?"

The two men shook hands with Pathaway, and descended by a long detour to the Valley. Pathaway and the Shoshoné soon after followed by a more direct route. On the way, they were met by the dog Calamity, alias Misfortune. He had a piece of bark in his mouth, which he dropped at the hunter's feet. Pathaway picked it up, and read the following words, rudely cut with a knife:

"IN A PISON DIFFIKILTY. CANT GIT OUT, I ALLOW. TAKE GOOD KEER O THE DOG KALAMITY, AND DONT LET IT BE KNOWD DOWN IN THE CLEARINGS BUT NICK WHIFFLES IS DOIN WELL."

"What says the talking bark?" asked the Shoshoné.

"That our friend is in trouble, and expects no relief. Indian Joe, I fear, betrayed him."

"Were the eyes of the gray hunter so dim?" demanded the chief.

"I trusted the boy because he discharged the trust that was reposed in him with fidelity," answered Pathaway.

"Brave men are not always cunning," returned Multnomah. "One may have the strength of the buffalo without the knowledge of the fox or the subtlety of the serpent. Had the pale-face asked the Shoshoné, he would

have told him what the smooth-faced boy was," added the Indian, with a slight gesture of contempt.

"White men," responded Pathaway, "speak their thoughts, but the red men disguise them."

"Doubledark did not speak his mind to Multnomah. He did not say to his friend: 'I am going with the boy to the Valley, where the voice of the Thunder-Spirit is sometimes heard.' Had he said this, the Shoshoné would have told him better."

"Doubledark is reputed wise. He baffles his enemies; he has eyes that are not afraid to look at the sun."

"The wise sometimes act without wisdom. The heart of Doubledark was heavy for the pale woman. He no sleep at night, because she was before him in dreams. Heart too soft—risk too much. But Multnomah is his brother, and he goes to find him."

"But Madge?" said Pathaway.

"First Nick, then Madge," replied the Indian.

"I cannot and will not object to any reasonable undertaking in behalf of the trapper, Nick; but the helplessness of the young girl, Madge, appeals continually to my sympathies."

They had now reached the spot where they had found the trail of Madge on the previous night. Pathaway hung anxiously over the imprint of her little feet, while the chief observed him in silence.

"The Shoshoné," said the young man, at length, "is older than I; he understands what is good, and I will listen to his words."

"Multnomah knows the thoughts of the young hunter; he thinks of the boy-equaw; his spirit is heavy for the fair face of the girl. But young men are apt to be hasty. Listen to the talk of Multnomah, and if it is no good, so take it."

The chief pointed at Nick's dog, and added: "He comes from Doubledark—he knows the way back."

"True!" said the young man, struck with the idea. "He can, without doubt, find his master. I am ready to go."

The dog, meantime, had turned toward Devil's Gate, and was looking back over his shoulder at the Indian and Pathaway.

"Go on, dog, go on!" said the latter, and the animal, with ears erect, and a satisfied wag of the tail, sprang into the tunnel. The passage had lost none of its gloominess since the young man visited it. Its rough and time-worn portals frowned grimly on them as they entered, and though the morning sun was beaming brightly, its rays penetrated but a short distance into the passage, falling refracted and broken on rock and column.

"Feet have walked here since the sun came up," said Multnomah.

"How do you know?" asked Pathaway.

"Look!" returned the chief. "Here is a sign."

The hunter stooped over the spot indicated by the Indian, and detected the imprint of a damp moccasin.

"Yes," he answered, "some of the mountaineers have left the Valley recently."

"Let my brother be dumb. To-day they go out and they come in. Cap'n Dick watch very sharp."

"My tongue is sealed," returned the young man, and threaded his way noiselessly after the Shoshoné, the dog keeping a few paces in advance. A portion of the distance they could not see their canine guide, but occasionally heard his feet upon the stones. They issued from the darkness without accident, and passing the boiling spring, arrived at the stream, which they were about to cross, when they perceived that the dog had stopped in the middle of it. This pause was of short duration, for the moment he found that the circumstance had attracted their notice, he walked down the bed of the stream to a point where it ran beneath an arch of sandstone, and was lost to view. Under this arch their fore-footed guide disappeared.

"Bad men hide from the sunlight like owls," muttered the Indian.

In a moment they were in utter darkness, guided only by the splashing of the dog's feet in the water. Pathaway did not remember that he had ever experienced such a feeling of complete isolation. Could one be more hidden from the world? he queried. What if a fragment of rock should fall from the dark roof and shut them in? He shuddered as the thought shot through his mind. He could not resist

picturing some of the horrors of such a fate. The air was damp and chilly, and the walls, when he touched them in feeling his way forward, felt like blocks of ice.

By-and-by a thread of light appeared, but which was much farther off than it at first seemed; it grew stronger as they advanced, and crept down, as they perceived, through a cleft in the rock. Both parties hailed the light of day with satisfaction.

While pausing to breathe the fresher air and catch a glimpse of the upper world, Multnomah's eyes fell upon an extinguished and half-burned torch thrust into a crevice, where it had been placed, doubtless, by some one for future use. The torch was at once lighted by means of one of Pathaway's pistols, the dog waiting for them impatiently. They soon reached a spot where the subterranean way suddenly widened, and the ceiling was more lofty. The stream ran onward in a narrow bed, while there was firm and comparatively dry footing to the right and left.

Calamity now darted forward to the right, at right angles with the stream, and presently they heard him bark loudly. Both quickened their steps. The light fell upon a dark chasm, upon the brink of which the dog was standing. Multnomah approached it carefully, and sinking upon his knees, held the torch over the abyss.

"Nicholas! Nicholas!" said Pathaway, in a low voice.

There was no answer to this call.

"He must be here," added the young man. "The instincts of the dog cannot err. Nicholas! Nicholas!"

He spoke louder, but his voice seemed to rebound from the abyss as if the darkness below were impenetrable even to sound.

Calamity bayed persistently, his heavy voice echoing over their heads like a volley of musketry.

"Hullo! you there, dog?" hailed a voice that appeared to come from a great distance. "Could you raise any body to come arter me, old feller, or must I make up my mind to give up things of a sublunar nature in this pesky hole."

"Nick! Nick!" shouted Pathaway. "Your friends are here. What has happened? How fare you?"

"Is that you, Colonel? I'm glad to hear a human voice. I'm in a p'ison diffikilty, I swear to gracious!" said the voice that incontestably belonged to Nick Whiffles.

"You're alive, thank God!" exclaimed the hunter.

"Yes, alive, but the condemned boy carried me a good 'eal out o' my depth. Here I am in a well deep enough for the driest seasons, I allow, though there happens to be but little water in it jest now. I'd come up and see ye if I could, but I can't leave; which onp'liteness I hope you'll excuse."

"But how did you get in, and how shall we get you out?" inquired Pathaway.

"It all come of that boy," replied the trapper, in a melancholy voice. "And he wasn't much in the boy line, neither. I'm a good 'eal took down, Colonel—ever so much took down!"

"You are, indeed," replied the hunter; "more, I fear, than we shall be able to take you up."

"Treachery's somethin' we can't guard ag'in, and the best on us is liable to be took in by it. Wait a moment, Colonel, and I'll climb up the rocks where I can speak to ye with less exartion." Nick was silent a short time, during which Pathaway heard him toiling up the rocks.

"I can't git no higher," he said, presently, "for it's smooth as my hand above the ledge I'm standin' on. I've tried hard enough to find a foothold and a hand-hold, but I might 'a' spared my strength. I don't think a human critter ever got into jes' sich a diffikilty afore. My gran'father prehabs come the nearest to it when he was slopped out of his sulky into the crater o' Vesuvius; but then he was blowed out onto tarry farmy ag'in by the next 'ruption. But there's been no 'ruption here, and wouldn't be 'f I's to stay to alletarnity. Oh Lord, no!"

Nick reflected a moment on this unaccommodating state of affairs, and went on again.

"I never had much faith in the boy, as you know, colonel; I allers looked on him with a sp'icious eye. 'Little Pison,' sez I to myself every time I seed him, 'you a'n't here for no good.' I had him tied more nor once, as it won't trouble you to recollect. But when he come to speak about the gal, sayin' that he'd

lead me to her, he took me at my weak p'int. If there's anything more nor another that softens me, it's calico in diffikilty. He looked honest-like, and I thought I'd trust him. He took me to the Devil's Gate, on a bee line, and it wasn't the fust time by many that he'd traversed the ground, I allow. He guided me through the tunnel like a little craft towing a big one, though I noticed that he got short-breathed and tired scramblin' over the rocks. Well, we reached the stream, when the lad left me awhile, sayin' he'd be back ag'in. I confess I felt mighty skeery and distrustful while he's gone, but he 'peared arter a time with a couple o' pine torches. This looked as if he's in airnest, and the careumstance give me courage."

"Take one o' these here," sez he, "and foller me." So I took one of the torches and follered him. His voice didn't sound Inginy a bit, when he said that, but I was thinkin' so much of Nanny, that I didn't reflect on it long. Well, on he went, steppin' 'ery gingerly, as if Inginy boys was nat'rally afeard of the water. He shivered, too, sev'ral times, which made me think he was a odd redskin. But it often happens that our wit and wisdom don't come till arterwards. Good swimmers are drowned nighabout as frequent as other folks; so old trappers who have trod the peraries hard on to thirty year may be deceived by some silly animile that takes it into its head to play 'possum. As I was tellin' ye, the boy went mincin' along afore me like a French dancin'-master, without so much as turnin' the axletrees of his big eyes on to me till we reached this hole, which was as dark as darkness crowded in could make it. As Little P'ison held his torch over it, I thought the darkness had been rammed down with a ram-rod, by mighty! Glancin' to one side on't, I see a rope hangin' down. 'This is a well, isn't it?' sez I, 'where ye git the water for the 'stablishment?' Then the pesky nondescription of a boy spoke Inginy ag'in arter the old fashion.

"Doubledark go down; take hold rope—slip along—come to bottom; then let go; walk good ways; turn fust one way right hand, turn next 'tother way left hand; bime-by find white woman." I looked at him inquirin', as 'twere, but he stood starin' down to his feet, and pesky small feet they was, though, as I told ye, my wit and wisdom didn't come till too late. Somethin' said to me, 'Nick Whiffles, don't go down!' Then I thought of pretty Nanny, Portneuf, and Andrew Jeanjean. 'Little Inginy,' sez I, in a voice that made him tremble, I allow, 'I have my fears and doubts consarnin' your natur', and if you play me any o' your heathen tricks, I'll skulp ye, I swear to gracious!' Havin' said them words, I examined the rope to see if 'twas made sufficient fast, and findin' it 'twas, trusted myself on it, like a fool, and went down with my torch. I swung about some time durin' the descent in a way that was frightful; but I reached the bottom in safety. 'All right!' sez I, and turned to look for the passage that I's to foller with so many turnin's to find the trapper's darter. Would you b'lieve it, colonel, I thought of that song poor Andrew used to sing, and didn't keer a straw about the danger. Holdin' my light afore me, I soon parceived that I couldn't go a great ways in any direction 'thout runnin' plump ag'in a wall of airth and rock. 'Nick Whiffles, you've done wrong,' somethin' said to me ag'in, and a little qualm come over me. I made a sweep all round me with the torch, but there was no passage—not a sign of a passage!

"As the conviction come over me, I seed the rope a glidin' up over the jagged p'int like a sarpint. That p'ison boy had drawed it up! I knowed then that I's deceived.

"What you doin' with that rope?" I shouted.

"Drawin' it up," sez he, in a voice that was mighty clear.

"What you drawin' it up for?" sez I, kind of husky-like in the throat.

"So you can't git up," sez he.

"You've betrayed me, you little redskin!" sez I. "But don't think that you'll git the advantage of me for final. You might cram thin hole with p'ison diffikilties," sez I, "and you couldn't keep Nick Whiffles down! Nick Whiffles isn't of a natur' to be kept down."

"Are the eyes of Doubledark so very dark?" screamed my guide from above, in a tone that surprised me woundedly, 'twas so much like a woman's. 'Has the old trapper become blind that he can't distinguish the false from the true?"

"There wasn't a particle of Inginy in the voice, then; 'twas a white and girlish voice. "When next you want to see Inginy Joe," the critter went on, "inquire for Carlota, the outlaw's daughter."

"Colonel, I was dumbfounded! Scarcely has anything come across me as that did. I was vexed and out o' sorts with myself for bein' taken in by a gal, though the character was played with a heap o' discretion and cunning."

"Gal," I said, "you've throwd dust in my eyes, I own, and it goes crossways to my pride, but you done it well, and have nat'ral gifts that might be put to better uses. Bein' a woman, you can't intend to do me no harm, but jest to have your woman's joke; and as you've had it, drop the rope ag'in, and I'll climb out o' this rat-trap; for it's oncommon damp and onhealthy, and my lungs isn't so strong as some. Don't be afeard that I'll hurt ye, for I won't. Nick Whiffles wouldn't hurt one o' the female persuasion on no account."

"Remain where you be for the present," sez she. "You took the advantage of me when I's nobody but poor Inginy Joe, and now you're gittin' your pay for't. Howsomenever," she went on, "I don't say that I mean to starve you, though you've acted the spy on the Mountaineers long enough to deserve it."

"With that I told her that we couldn't none on us struggle ag'in Providence; and if 'twas so writ in the book o' fate that I was to perish in sich and sich a manner, in that way I should perish. 'Marcy is a good thing in a woman,' I observed, in hopes to tetch her heart, and then the light disappeared above. Placin' my ear to the rocks, I could hear her walkin' away. My feelin' was onpleasant; I can't describe 'em. For a little while, I allow I desponded, and the little diffikilty growed bigger every minute, and death looked at me from the damp walls, grim and awful.

"I stuck the torch into a crevice and watched it burn, moralizin' in a wholesome way. I heerd a mournful sound above. It was Calamity howlin' melancholy. I left him with Sebastian, but he took my trail and follered. Though the notes he made wasn't cheerful, I didn't feel nigh so lonely and cast down as I did afore. I talked to him as if he's human, and he talked 'ordin' to his gifts back ag'in, which was all he could do. My torch burned down and went out, and I sot there gloomy enough, 'thout thinkin' of any way of gittin out the diffikilty. The damp air sort of chilled my blood; I'd been broke o' my rest sev'ral nights, and I went off in a heavy, nightmareish sleep that lasted a good while. I waked up cleared in jedgment, though benumbed in body. The dog was still at his post, and would you b'lieve it, colonel, on openin' my eyes I could see nighabout as well as afore the torch went out. The eye 'commodates itself to darkness, you know, and people in dungeons, I've heerd, see very well arter awhile. I thought it time to make an effort, and I'arn if there's any chance of escape. Seein' the rocks were pooty rough, I didn't know but I could climb out. Findin' foothold, I mounted with a deal o' trouble, but could git no higher nor here. While I stood lookin' up wistfully, I seed somethin' stickin' in a crevice; it was a piece o' birch-bark, which had apperiently been used for a torch, for it was rolled up, and one eend on't charred with fire. I took it, and settin' on the ledge where I am now, engraved a message on't with my knife. Then I picked off a fragment o' rock and rolled it up in the bark. I didn't succeed in throwin' it up at the fust trial, nor the second, neither, but was obleeged to go down to the bottom for't sev'ral times, which was no slight job; but presently I got it up.

"Take that," sez I to the dog, "and run like p'ison! Go," sez I, "right quick to Sebastian or the colonel, or somebody, and they'll know what to do."

"Bow-wow!" answered the animile.

"Come back with 'em," sez I, "and show 'em the way."

He started off, and I've waited for him with what patience I could, though it's very dull business down here, with sich a prospect afore me. I knew I could depend on you and the Inginy, and trusted that Providence would befriend Nick Whiffles once more."

"Your story is a strange one," replied Pathaway. "So Carlota was my guide. 'Twas a singular whim, surely. It seems incredible, but I can now recall many inconsistencies in the character of Indian Joe."

"There was one among us who was not de-

ceived, I allow," said Nicholas, "and that one isn't fur off, though his natur' isn't white natur'."

The Shoshoné was obviously flattered by this remark.

"The eyes of the young hunter," he added, addressing Pathaway, "should have looked into the heart of Indian Joe, and seen himself there as he sees himself in the water. The Shoshoné sees much and speaks little."

"Jes' so, chief! And now perhaps you'd better look round a little, and see if you can't find the rope that she took away. It can't be fur off, in course. I can fast and thirst as well as another, but the feelin' isn't by no means comfortable."

Pathaway immediately began to search for the rope, and found it in the obscure background of the cavern where it had been placed by Carlota. To make it fast and lower one end into the shaft, was the work of a few moments. The young man feared Nick would not have strength enough to ascend, and expressed himself to that effect.

"Not a bit on't, colonel!" said Nicholas, as he commenced climbing. "These muskles o' mine are the right kind for sarvice. They've been tried a thousand times, and there isn't a weak spot in 'em. There's no useless fat on 'em. Fat, colonel, is the enemy of muskles. For strength and hardihood nothin' is wantin' but the solid flesh. Here I come, you see!"

Nicholas ascended the rope hand over hand, but the gray hunter perceived that the action cost him more effort than he was willing to acknowledge. Calamity, meantime, stood with his forefeet on the verge of the shaft, watching the progress of his master. His bushy tail wagged with satisfaction, while his large eyes sparkled with joy as he reached the surface.

Pathaway and the Shoshoné each caught him by an arm and drew him from his living sepulchre. The veteran did not speak, but sank upon the hard floor of the cavern.

The dog leaped upon his shoulders, licked his face, rubbed his great head against his cheeks, laid down upon him, rolled over, made a sound like a dumb person trying to speak, and a hundred dog-demonstrations of delight.

The trapper put his arms around his neck, and for a short time rested his damp forehead upon it.

"To Providence fust," he murmured, "to you next, and the humans arterward. These is the sentiments of Nick Whiffles, and on this platform you'll find him. Yes," he repeated as if communing with himself, "on this here platform you'll find him. 'Tisn't the loudest thankgivin'," he went on seriously, "that's the deepest, and the most acceptable to the Master o' Life. It may be said, perhaps it has been said, that I haven't them feelin's o' reverence that dependent critters oughter have; but howsomenever that may be—and I won't be so presumptuous as to be my own jedge—I do feel grateful for life when it's spared, and for the kind mercy and protection of the Power that can see into the vaults of the mountings with a clearer eye nor the sun can look down upon the peraries at noonday." Nick drew his brown hand slowly across his eyes.

No one interrupted him. The Shoshoné looked gravely toward the murky roof above him, and Pathaway was sensibly affected.

"Dogs," continued the trapper anon, "was made for man, and when they're well-used, they're true and never-failin' friends. Lose everything you've got, be turned out o' house and home and become a beggar in the streets, and your dog'll foller ye all the same. Patches and rags don't disgust him; he'll lick your hand the same when you've no bread to give him. The dog don't turn up his nose at you—the dog don't—when you're in disgrace, and at last will howl over your grave in giniwine grief when there's not a human bein' to drop a tear on it."

Nicholas placed his hand on the shaggy head, and the eyes beneath beamed on him with unspeakable affection.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE OUTLAWS AT HOME.

Nick Whiffles arose and stood erect.

"Colonel," he said, stretching out his hand, "I thank ye! 'Thank ye' is words that is easy spoke, but not allers felt."

"It would be unjust, Nicholas, to take much credit to myself for your rescue. To the chief of the Shoshonés you are so much in-

debted, that it would be unpardonable in me not to make particular mention of his name."

"It's the modesty o' youth," replied the trapper, and it's a thing I like to see in these days when boys think they're men afore they have trapped a beaver or brought down a buf faler at fifty rods." Then advancing to Multnomah and confronting him steadily, "Ingin, I know your natur' and you know mine. We don't need much said atween us. This isn't the fust debt I owe ye, and I don't know of any individooal, be the complexion of his skin what it may, that I'd rather owe a good turn to. We've slept with our feet at the same fire, Shoshoné, and took the otter and the beaver from the same waters."

"It is as Doubledark says; Multnomah knows what is in his heart," returned the chief.

"Sartin," returned Nick. "It's your natur' to be quick at understandin' things."

The Indian did not answer, but making a gesture of silence, walked quickly to the submountain stream. Nick and the hunter saw him stop and stand in a fixed and listening attitude.

Pathaway was holding the torch, and its rays glimmered feebly against the person of the chief, making him resemble a piece of iron statuary.

"It's nat'ral to him, nat'ral to him," whispered Nick. "Red blood is quicker o' hearin' nor white, less the white is eddicated by practice. He hears somethin' which you probably can't. Now, colonel, lay down and put your ear agin the ground, pervidin' there's any nat'ral airth hereabouts, and I'll wager you'll scarcely hear a sound equal to the tickin' of a watch."

"I'm not so much of a novice as you may imagine," replied Pathaway, somewhat piqued at Nick's low estimate of his powers. Thrusting the torch into a crevice, the young hunter tried the experiment recommended by his friend.

"Wrong, trapper, wrong for once! I hear the distant splashing of water," he said.

Nicholas stretched his person upon the floor of the cavern with a quickness that was like the spring of a cat. For a space he was immobile as the solid foundation beneath him.

"It is very well—very well, indeed, for a beginner," he said, approvingly. "And not that, neither, but mighty cute in one that hasn't trod the peraries many years. There is splashin' in the water! If you live, you'll yit be able to walk side an' side with the Shoshoné."

"Your good opinion is gratifying. A word of praise from Nick Whiffles is something to be proud of. The sounds, trapper, come this way."

"And the Ingin, too. It's a right good thing, colonel, to have a critter of so much sagacity to help us in the time o' need. Now I know from his manner, by the way he walks and the way he looks (and it comes of bein' with him) that he's made up his mind what to do."

The first words of Multnomah verified the prediction of Nicholas.

"Comin' down the water—two, three, four. White men."

The chief plucked the torch from the crevice, and swinging it to increase the haze, strode with all the rapidity compatible with wariness into the dark background. Pathaway noticed that Nick followed him with unwavering confidence, and his own spirits arose responsive to his evident assurance. He feared that the cave was not sufficiently capacious to afford them a secure hiding-place from those who approached; but his apprehensions were speedily dispelled by the increasing extension of the subterranean vault. The floor was now clayey and damp. The chief turned around a sharp abutment of earth and extinguished the torch.

Nick was as quiet and as little disturbed as if in his own solitary hut, a score of miles from a known enemy.

Pathaway wished to question the Shoshoné, but with the satisfied example of Nick before him, restrained the impulse. He was wise enough to comprehend, that if one older and more experienced than himself was perfectly reliant on the knowledge and trustworthiness of the Shoshoné, he should also manifest the same faith and confidence. He therefore composed his features, and appeared as stoical as possible. Wisdom, perhaps, consists in imitating those supposed to know more than ourselves. This is the philosophy of the world, at least, and is acted daily by those who wish

to appear well in the eyes of pseudo society.

The young man awaited, not without secret anxiety, the development of events. It is far less easy to exercise the higher qualities of the human mind than to read of them; and for a time even the brave spirit of Pathaway was agitated by suspense. The consciousness that he was armed, and supported also by two persons of tried courage and constancy, inspired him with confidence not easily shaken.

The splashing of the water was now such as to indicate the proximity of the coming parties. The light from their torches, too, glimmered on the passing stream and flickered upon the rocky roof among the drooping stalactites, and the large drops of water collected upon the sharp points, just ready to drop. Looking from behind the protecting angle, Pathaway and his companions saw a man emerge from the subterranean passage, bearing a torch in his right hand. It was Dick Hendricks. His left arm was bandaged and in a sling, while his features were pale from loss of blood apparently. The blaze shining on his face revealed in a striking manner the peculiar hardness and recklessness of his nature. The hunter experienced an unpleasant thrill of astonishment at beholding the next object that presented itself. Andrew Jeanjean came after the outlaw captain, his countenance nearly as pallid as that of the latter, and his hands secured by a cord about the wrists. This unexpected spectacle gave the young man unalloyed pain. He would have observed the visages of his comrades but for the obscurity.

Walking behind the prisoner appeared three armed men.

What did this portend? A visit to such a locality, under such circumstances, could have no good for its object, and Pathaway trembled for the trapper's fate.

Jeanjean's expression was firm and resigned—like one conscious of peril, yet resolved to meet it with becoming manliness. As Hendricks ushered him into the cavern, he threw an inquiring, earnest look around him, and his cheeks, the hunter thought, grew paler. The robber captain flourished his torch till his menacing face seemed set in a circle of fire, then approached the shaft with cautious yet hasty steps. An indignant glow warmed the hunter's blood. The pulsations of his heart grew quick with expectation, nor could he refrain from drawing Nick farther behind the abutment, and whispering:

"Nicholas, I am sure I can depend on you, Nicholas, if anything dreadful is to be prevented."

"I think so, colonel, I think so!" returned Nick, pressing the young man's hand. "You haven't knowed me a great while parsonally but you've heerd of me, and can form some idee what my natur' is."

Pathaway gratefully returned the pressure of the trapper's hand, and hurried back to watch the progress of events.

"Where's the rope?" asked Hendricks, in a tone that indicated that his temper had been recently ruffled.

"It's hangin' in the hole, cap'n," answered one of his fellows.

"Ninon, my poor Ninon!" exclaimed Jeanjean, dejectedly, while his breast heaved with emotion.

"Go down!" said Hendricks, pointing to the rope with his torch.

Andrew turned toward Hendricks and replied:

"I have followed you hither because I could not resist your will. I came to the Valley on an errand of mercy, but unfortunately fell into your power. From you, Richard Hendricks, I expect little kindness, yet I do entreat of you to pause before you proceed to burden your soul with another crime. Stop here in your career, restore the voyageur's daughter to liberty, and here in this deep and secret sepulchre resolve to change your mode of life. Reflect a moment, Hendricks; ask yourself if wrong done to a fellow-being will bring quietude and happiness."

"Go down!" repeated Hendricks, gruffly.

"Life is sweet to the young," muttered Jeanjean, sighing.

"I tell you to go down!" cried Hendricks, fiercely.

"If my hands were free, you would be less insolent, Dick Hendricks!" retorted Jeanjean.

"Fools!" exclaimed Hendricks, addressing his men, "untie his hands."

Andrew's hands were at liberty in a moment.

"Now," added Hendricks, drawing a pistol, "there is nothing to hinder you from goin' down that rope. Don't trifle, for I'm busy

to-day, and it isn't safe to contradict me."

"If I am to die," said Jeanjean, struggling to maintain his composure, "give me at least a quick and decent death."

"Go down, and we'll talk of that when we have more time!" retorted the captain, morosely cocking his pistol.

Jeanjean looked hopelessly up at the damp roof, to the right, to the left, then down at the dark abyss, leading he knew not whither, designed, perhaps, to be his sepulchre.

"Choose, whether you will go down by the law of gravitation, or by your own muscles," said the captain, advancing the muzzle of his pistol to within a few inches of Andrew's head.

Pathaway beheld this scene with feelings that he could scarcely restrain. Once he was on the point of bounding from his hiding-place and hurling the robber trapper into the shaft, but the hand of Nicholas grasping his arm, kept him back. The figure of the Shoshoné rested against the abutment as if cut in relief upon the wall. The hunter could see dimly the dusky outlines of his person, fixed and undemonstrative.

Andrew Jeanjean breathed heavily, then stooping and seizing the rope, began to descend. Captain Dick replaced his pistol with a grim smile, and partly drew a bowie from his belt. A demon within him was tempting him to cut the rope. A suspicion of such a thing appeared to cross the mind of Jeanjean: for Pathaway saw his pale, anxious face turned upward an instant toward the light from which he was passing, then the pallid countenance sank lower and lower till it was covered by the darkness of the abyss. The vibrations of the rope as Andrew swung to and fro in his descent, were visible some time, then, when all tension upon it had ceased, it was hastily drawn up.

"The critter'll be safe there till he's wanted," muttered Captain Dick. "There's too many sich fellers prowlin' round the Valley. We must put an end to this spyin' business, or the ropes are twisted that'll hang us. None on us will be obleeged to wait till hemp grows if sich chaps as Nick Whiffles and that young vagabond, Pathaway, are allowed to have their way."

"That's true, cap'n, and I've always said so," responded one of his followers.

"I wish they were all in there," continued Hendricks, shaking his fist over the shaft. "Our business will never flourish till they are out of the way. All has gone wrong since they come to this region. There's Carlóta has got her head full of strange notions, and seems to be bewitched arter this young hunter in gray. We shall have a company of United States soldiers on us next, I s'pose."

He drew his hand over his ruffled face impatiently.

"Then there's Seven-Plumes; he's not to be trusted I'm afeard. We might have exterminated 'em all if his red scoundrels hadn't give back at the first fire. If I'd had a half dozen of my own fellers with me, the thing would been done. Come, boys, let's leave this devil-den and start up our game again. It's a long road that hasn't no turn in't. Good-by, Jeanjean!" he shouted, hoarsely, then retreated with his fellows.

"If your road isn't longer than I think 'tis, it'll have a turn soon, and a round turn, too," muttered Nick, whose feelings required instant expression. "If I'd my shootin'-iron, I allow I should drawed a bead on him, but things isn't allers as we want 'em, though I s'pose all works for the best in the end. You seem to be nervous, colonel."

"Impatient, angry, if you will!" replied the hunter, with a long breath.

The footsteps of Hendricks and his men rapidly receded.

"There's somethin' in surgery," resumed Nick, "a sight in surgery, colonel. I was immorally sartin the lad's senses would come back to him good's new; but I's sorry, by mighty, when I heard him speak up so sensible and nat'ral, for if he'd continued as he was afore, he wouldn't been in this pesky hole at all. Now you be quiet, colonel, and I'll give him a surprise as 'twere. Strike a light, Injin, and set that torch agoin'."

The Shoshoné having relighted the torch, the parties proceeded to the shaft. Nick having again enjoined the chief and the hunter to silence, seated himself on a rock with his legs hanging down into the chasm, and sang in a voice not entirely musical, a fragment of Jeanjean's song having first remarked "that pooty likely he should make a good many p'ison mistakes."

"My sweetheart was a bloomin' flower,
Growin' beside some kind o' water;
I lurked at midnight round her bower,
And wished I had the trapper's darter.
Oh, the trapper's darter!
Oh, the trapper's darter!"

Nick bent forward and listened, but getting no response, went on:

"Her eyes was like two stars agleamin',
Her face was fair, her lips was sweet;
Her smile was allers on me beamin',
I knelt, I reckon, at her feet.
Oh, the trapper's darter!
Oh, the trapper's darter!"

"Who sings? Who, for Heaven's sake, is there?" cried Jeanjean, whose lips surprise at first kept mute.

"Nick Whiffles and others, and the best on't is we are at your service," replied the trapper. "Here's the colonel and the Shoshoné, and here's a rope that I'm goin' to fling down to ye to come up on. Look out for't—it's comin'. Stop a minute till I look at the fastenin'. All right! Be keeful and cool, and you'll do it. I've been down there and know the natur' on't. But I had a friend—though he uses four legs instead o' two—a friend that stood by me; though he didn't stan' by me exactly neither, but went for help."

The tension on the rope indicated that Andrew was ascending. Pathaway awaited, not without trepidation, the result. Presently, after several pauses, Jeanjean appeared at the top of the shaft, and was drawn out by his friends.

"This is indeed unexpected!" he gasped, exhibiting strong emotion. "I had given up all hope of rescue, and bewildered and overpowered by misfortune, was striving to reconcile my mind to my fate, when the singing of Nicholas reached my ears."

"It was nothin' but plain singin', and not sich as I have done, by no means. You should 'a' heard me when my voice was stronger, and I's more familiar with the gamit and dimisimi-quavers. I didn't git all the words of the Trapper's Darter right, but I got the sense of 'em, I allow, and didn't hurt the rhyme nor the reason. How's your head, Andrew? Haven't seed ye since I tried my surgery on ye."

"I have been informed of your friendly office. I need not tell you, Nick Whiffles, how great my gratitude is," replied Jeanjean.

"You're slightly indebted to the colonel, too. He found ye in the condemndest difficulty, and tore the flesh from his fingers in diggin' ye out. But come, let us leave this pesky hole. We've been in it too long; leastwise, I have, for my stomach's in a mournful state o' destitution, and the sound o' that runnin' water has been tantalizin' my thirst for a long time."

The parties moved toward the outlet. Reaching the little stream, Nicholas refreshed himself by a copious draught of its cooling waters. The Shoshoné, bearing the torch, led the way, and in a little while they passed from beneath the damp and dripping arch to the open air.

Jeanjean and Nick assuredly felt grateful, for moisture gathered in their eyes as they turned their faces to the golden sun.

"I's never buried alive afore myself, but my gran'father, the historian, rode through a kentry where they used to bury the live husbands with the dead wives, and the live wives with the dead husbands. He didn't stay there on'y long enough to bait his hoss and make a few memorandums a settin' in his sulky."

The hunter looked at Nick to see if he really believed in his grandfather, but the trapper was gazing persistently at vacancy. The Shoshoné cast the torch into the stream, and the waters bore it hissing from sight, then springing lightly from rock to rock, he guided the parties silently and swiftly from Trapper Valley.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE MOUNTAINEER.

The shades of night were darkening the mountains before the faint and faltering footsteps of the captives admonished Seven-Plumes that a halt was needful. He selected a sheltered spot, and seemed anxious to make his fair prisoners as comfortable as circumstances would permit. He prepared for them a couch of boughs, spread his own blanket upon it, and told them to sleep. Both, as may readily be believed, were too much agitated by the events of the day, and their novel and precarious situation to entertain for a moment the idea of slumber. Madge thought of the gray hunter and Nick; of the first with a hope of his coming; of the second, with feelings of sadness and apprehension. She pic-

tured to herself how brave the young man—Pathaway—would be on the trail; how skillfully he would discover the lightest pressure of her feet; how fearlessly he would thread their winding course; how generously he would sacrifice himself, and how heroically he would bear himself, when, having reached their lonely and cheerless bivouac, he should meet their captor hand to hand. These, it was true, were but dreams of fancy that floated through her mind, as she reclined upon the earth, looking at the changeless face of the Indian, who had seated himself a short distance from them, with his gun beside him, and his swarthy brow resting upon the palm of his hand.

Carlóta was less calm, her countenance indicating varying emotions. Her cheeks, now white, now red, evidenced a storm within not easily stilled.

"Night," said Seven-Plumes, "is the time for sleep. Let the white flowers rest."

"Talk not of rest, treacherous chief! Captives cannot sleep. Send us back to our lodges, and our sorrows will pass like the clouds, and sleep will cross the thresholds of our eyes with steps lighter than the flitting of a shadow," answered Carlóta.

"The Saskatchewan prairies lie along the river, and they are beautiful," said the chief. "The lodge of Seven-Plumes shall be set up near the best hunting-grounds."

"We are of one people and you of another, and it cannot be," answered Carlóta, with emphasis. "Carlóta, the child of the mountains, would die rather than enter the lodge of an Indian chief, to light his fire and cook his meat."

Seven-Plumes composed himself in an attitude of rest, but deigned no reply.

"Speak to him!" said Carlóta to Madge. "Change his purpose by ingenious appeals to his pride and magnanimity."

"'Tis useless; I cannot move him if I would, and I again assure you that I hail this captivity as light compared with that I should have suffered from you, had not matters taken this unexpected turn."

"Would you be the wife of yonder beast?" retorted Carlóta, angrily.

"Talk not of it. I hope for a better fate; and my greatest apprehension is, that my unlucky star will again place me in your hands."

With a sharp epithet of reproach, Carlóta turned her back upon Madge, and tried to shake her purpose no more, indulging bitterly in her own wayward and contradictory emotions.

The night rolled on. Mildly the moon and her starry court looked down upon the wilderness. The prairie-dog barked, the wolf howled, and the panther shrieked in the distance.

The temporary camp was in an open spot at the base of a mountain, shut in on one side by oaks, and on the other by mesquit and other shrubbery.

Madge closed her eyes and pretended to sleep, but started at the slightest sound, and invariably saw the fixed form of the Indian occupying the same place.

"I'm afraid!" muttered Carlóta, shivering. "It is lonely and so dismal," she added, as if speaking to herself. With these words she softly approached the chief, and with some signs of repugnance seated herself on the ground near him, casting timid glances from side to side. If her fear was feigned, it was certainly a close imitation of nature, and if Seven-Plumes was cognizant of it, he as well as Madge was probably deceived if it were not genuine. Carlóta drew her drapery more closely about her, and put herself in an attitude that indicated an intention to sleep. Seven-Plumes did not stir, nor betray in any manner that he had seen this movement.

Madge observed that Carlóta's dress carelessly covered a part of the Indian's gun, but had no suspicion that it was otherwise than accidental. Madge was now really sleepy. The fatigues and watchings of the last few days had worn upon her naturally delicate frame. Excitement only, had kept her from sinking. A kind of apathy stole over her. Carlóta and the chief gradually receded from her vision; a dark screen seemed let down between her and surrounding objects. She passed from the outward world of danger and alarm to the inner one of safety and quietude.

She awoke without knowing why; awoke as sleepers often do, with a vague thrill of terror. She glanced at Carlóta and the chief; they sat there like two images of stone. The moon had waned but little in the heavens, and

she knew that her sleep had been of short duration. She turned her wandering gaze up the steep ascent of the mountain. Far, far in the mist of the night, she saw the peaks of the eternal ranges, stern and cold. She turned her regards to the opposite quarter and saw a slight tremulous motion in the mesquit.

A fox or a hare has left his covert, she thought; and she continued to watch that indication of life, with an interest that people sometimes feel in trifles. The agitation drew nearer the open space. For a few seconds it ceased; then uprose from the foliage, a figure grim and eager, and smutched with blood. Madge recognized, with a thrill of horror, in the sallow and ghastly face, the features of Bill Brace. The discovery paralyzed her. A superstitious dread fell upon her senses with bewildering power.

A slight noise alarmed Seven-Plumes. He seized his gun, but the hands of Carlota were already grasping it. He tried to wrest it from her, but she maintained her hold with determined tenacity. She had seen Brace, and knew that he needed but the delay of a second, and she gained it for him. The next moment the chief was beaten down by the crushing weight of the mountaineer. But the Indian was lithe and supple, and it was not easy to retain him in his grasp; he was possessed, too, of great personal strength. He quickly slipped from beneath Brace, and a fierce struggle followed, of which Madge was a terrified spectator.

Carlota would willingly have aided the trapper, but the rapid evolutions of the two prevented her interposition. At length Seven-Plumes received another fall, but glided snake-like from under his adversary as before, and would have been entirely free, had not the latter grasped his belt and held him tenaciously. Brace was much exhausted, and the Indian dragged him several yards in his efforts to break his hold, while Carlota was trying, meantime, to place a weapon in the mountaineer's hand.

Madge, seeing the situation of affairs—scarcely knowing what she did—ran and caught the Indian's hunting-knife, which had fallen to the ground in the struggle, and gave it to him. He seized it, severed the belt, and fled with a shout. Madge also ran, but in an opposite direction. She expected momentarily to hear the heavy tread of Brace; but heard only the noise of her own flight. To her all places seemed alike, if they sheltered her from Carlota; and so she struggled onward, over bush and brake, through rank grass and tangled mesquit. Never before had that rugged way been pressed by feet so dainty. She was soon weary, and sat down in a strip of timber that skirted a small prairie. Above her was the dim arch of heaven, studded with the pale and melancholy stars; beneath, the dewy earth, in the verdure of which reposed the rattlesnake; to the right and left, stretched out the varied scenery of the north—woods frequented by wild beasts, prairies traversed by the buffalo, valleys where the grizzly bear made his home, and swamps of chaparral where the panther lay hidden by day.

Madge, with ready apprehension, realized the frightful isolation of her situation; but delicate and sensitive as she was, the name of Carlota was more fearful than all. The hooting of an owl in a tree overhead gave her a sudden terror; while the cry of a far-off catamount produced an involuntary tremor. Presently, she heard the leaping of an animal; it came bounding toward her; she could hear its feet strike the leaves. She doubted not that the panther—the shriek of which she had heard, had scented her steps, and was coming to devour her. Her blood flowed sluggishly in her veins; she felt cold and faint. She thought of making an effort to escape; but what speed could clude the arrow-like swiftness of an animal so dreaded—what sagacity throw him from the trail? She sank upon her knees and covered her face, and awaited, with trembling horror, the coming of the beast. The sound of leaping drew nearer and nearer, and Madge's heart nearly ceased to beat. The terrible creature was at hand; in a moment, he would rend her! There was an instant of supreme agony of expectation. Two paws were laid upon her, and a convulsive shuddering passed over her frame. A great, familiar voice said, "Bow-wow!" and Madge cried out with inexpressible joy: the dreaded animal was Nick's favorite dog, Calamity!

The appearance of this faithful creature produced a happy revulsion of feeling. Fear

and despondency gave place to more tranquil emotions. The wonderful sagacity and fidelity of the dog, she doubted not, would be the means of restoring her to those friends who had manifested so much interest in her welfare. Had she been well-assured of the safety of Pathaway and Nick Whiffles, her courage and confidence would have been quite restored.

With the dog crouching beside her, she waited patiently for the return of day, firm in the belief that her canine protector would not desert her.

It was near morning. The shadowy obscurity of twilight dimmed the air and surrounding scenery. Madge had just awakened from a refreshing sleep, and was looking around with a half-conscious, half-bewildered expression, when the dog arose to his feet and assumed a belligerent attitude. She saw his lips quiver, his eyes light up, his long hair become erect. Madge followed the direction of his threatening eyes, and beheld a spectacle calculated to inspire her with fresh alarm. This unwelcome apparition was no other than Brace, the mountaineer, who had approached by an open way, the long grass muffling the sound of his steps. His garments were torn and disordered, his head bare, save its natural covering, which hung matted and stained upon his forehead, swarthy cheeks, and tawny neck. His face, where it was not bruised and discolored, had a singularly ghastly sallowness. His eyes were glassy, and might have expressed vindictiveness, hate, or fear, or all combined. His muscular body was thrown forward, and his weight appeared to rest upon his rifle.

A faint and smothered cry escaped the young woman's lips.

"I've follered—I've found ye, but you needn't be afear'd," said the mountaineer, speaking slowly, and with evident exertion.

Madge averted her eyes to shut out the grisly figure of Brace.

"Keep the dog still, gal, and hear what I've got to say."

The voice of the mountaineer was so husky that she looked up.

"It's cost me a good 'eal o' trouble to git here, but I'm glad to see ye afore I give up."

He paused, then went on:

"I'm goin' under, gal—goin' under. The fall over the cliff bruised me terrible. I shouldn't been here, if I hadn't struck in the top of a tree; the branches saved me from instant death, though I lay stunned some time. Finally, I come to and clambered down the tree, swearin' vengeance ag'in the Ingin; for I ketch'd a glimpse of him, as he pushed me over. You can't tell what I suffered fallin'! I thought of every act of my life afore I struck the tree. You've no idee, miss, how fast a cretur can think when he's fallin' to his death. The book o' my life was open, and I read it goin' down. But when I found myself alive, my wrath turned ag'in the Blackfoot. I dragged myself out o' the Valley, and then I staggered along the trail arter the traitor. Whenever I come to a stream, I cast myself into it, and swallered water like a run-down buffaloe. I overtook him, and would had my revenge, if it hadn't been for you."

"It was the fear of Carlota inspired me," said Madge.

"I know her and I know you," answered Brace.

At that moment, Madge perceived Carlota standing behind a bush at the right of the mountaineer.

"Yes, I know ye now," added Brace, in a low, awed voice. "It wasn't I that done it! 'Twas Cap'n Dick that did the deed. I was there when they throwed ye in, but I didn't look at your face—I didn't care to look at your face that night. They said you was beautiful, and the men was clamorin' for ye and gittin' mutinous. The cap'n, bad as he was, didn't want to give ye up; he wanted ye himself, and it was himself or nobody. So to keep peace and preserve his authority, he took ye to Black Run on that dreadful night with half a dozen of his most reckless fellers, and you know what follered. I little thought I should see ye ag'in in the land o' the livin'; but you wasn't to die in that way, it 'pears. I shouldn't knowed ye if Carlota hadn't told me, for I wasn't familiar with your face. I've dreamed o' them white arms o' yourn beatin' the air more nor once, and 'twas a deed that has troubled me—you bein' a tender gal, and we bearded men that oughter pectect sich. Cap'n Hendricks couldn't forgit his victim so easy; he seed ye at Nick's camp, and your

face affected him terrible. Your boy-disguise couldn't pervent him from seein' a strange resemblance to the pooty young woman he had dealt with so cruel. He thought prehaps," continued Brace, reflectively, "that you'd say Yes, when you come to see the water runnin' swift and the men ready to do his biddin'."

"She—she has told you this!" exclaimed Madge. "She heard the tragedy of Black Run discussed while disguised as Indian Joe. She did not, she could not have consented to my destruction."

"It is of you that I would speak, and not of her. I wanted to tell ye afore I died that I've allers been sorry for bein' there and seein' that deed. Your forgiveness, perhaps, will soften a little the pangs of perdition."

"I forgive you freely, and as I hope God will forgive my own errors," said Madge.

"Where is your firmness and courage, Bill Brace?" cried Carlota, advancing.

"They have flowed away with my blood, and the savage natur' of the mountaineer is ebbin' with his life. I'm on the last trail, Carlota."

Brace tottered as he spoke, and after swaying unsteadily from side to side a moment, fell heavily to the earth.

"It's a rough trail and a long," gasped the mountaineer. "Where are you, Carlota? Can't you say a word to a man who got his death in your sarvice?"

"Poor fellow! poor fellow!" muttered Carlota.

"The trail grows dark! Where is the Valley?"

"He's dying!" said Carlota, solemnly.

"How black, how chilly the Valley is!" murmured the outlaw, shuddering.

"'Tis a dark Valley, indeed!" said Carlota with a nervous tremor.

"Hark!" cried Brace, starting up. "I hear the cap'n's horn and must go." The mountaineer fell back, gasped, and was off the trail forever.

Carlota stood beside the body, pale as marble, and as motionless. The death of one who had been faithful in her service could not but affect her.

"Look!" said Madge, impressively. "See how bad men die. Ask yourself if you are not the cause of his death; if you have not added to his crimes, consequently to the heaviness of his doom."

"Even such as he cannot die until called for," returned Carlota, "and one is not responsible for another's deeds."

"It is morning," continued Madge, "and to me this spot is fearful. I have now a faithful protector"—pointing to the dog—"and by his guidance shall seek those who will care for me. Will you go, or remain with your dead ruffian?"

Carlota's eyes flashed with indignation.

"Begone!" she cried. "And may I never more behold your face again!"

"Come, good friend," said Madge, and the dog sprang up, eager to obey her wishes. "Guide me to Nick, Calamity; take me to Nick."

The animal barked and frisked around her. Madge followed him a few steps, then, turning to Carlota, said, in a friendly voice:

"Carlota, come with me; and if I am fortunate enough to find friends, you shall receive no ill-treatment from them or me."

Carlota answered with an impatient wave of the hand, and Madge reluctantly left her.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

CARLOTA AND MADGE.

A shriek from Carlota arrested the footsteps of Madge. Running back a few steps, she saw Seven-Plumes grasping her by the arm, looking triumphantly into her face. The dog was springing forward to attack the Indian; but Madge restrained him. He stopped half way between her and the savage, whom he continued to regard in a menacing manner.

"Flower of the Mountains," said the warrior, with a sudden change of expression, "fear not the chief of the Blackfeet. He no harm—he no carry you away."

His voice was soft, and he looked in a friendly way at Madge.

"You give knife—you help Seven-Plumes—and his memory is good. If you go with him and be his wife, his heart very glad; but if the Flower of the Mountains says, 'I will go back to my people,' then she go."

"It is much," answered Madge, cunningly, "to be the wife of a great chief; but my thoughts and feelings flow another way. I can-

not go with you to the banks of the Saskatchewan. My heart would pine and be desolate, if I were there. Chief, I cannot dwell in your lodge."

"The country is pleasant," said Seven-Plumes, persuasively. "Game is abundant, and the prairies bear many kinds of flowers. In the summer, the sun is very bright; and in the winter, the air is pure and clear, and the furs of the lakes and streams keep cold at a distance."

"Birds of a kind only mate together. Seven-Plumes can woo the fairest daughters of his nation, and they will be proud of the attentions of so wise a chief."

Seven-Plumes was silent a moment. His voice was melancholy when he spoke again.

"Your words fill the heart of the red-man with sorrow," he said; "but you gave him liberty, and he gives you the same. But this pale girl"—he pointed to Carlota, and his tones were less friendly—"shall march to the hunting-grounds of the Blackfoot."

"Chief, use your power gently," remonstrated Madge. "Her skin is not the color of yours, and she will never be happy in your lodge."

Carlota glanced earnestly at her fair intercessor.

"Flower of the Mountains, talk not to the Blackfoot! Your voice is soft, but it cannot prevail: the girl of the Valley goes with me. The way is long, and the bright sun tells Seven-Plumes to depart. There will be many feet on his trail before night; but he cares not, for he has the cunning of the beaver."

"Chief, I assisted you to escape—hear me when I speak for the girl of the Valley," urged Madge.

"This pale woman no friend to you," answered Seven-Plumes. "Her heart very bitter, and her eyes dart fire at you. Your way is there"—he pointed as he spoke—"go in peace!"

"The dog! the dog!" exclaimed Carlota, stretching her hand earnestly toward Calamity.

The chief drew his knife from his belt, and sighting his grasp upon her arm, held it to her breast.

"Let the dog come, and the girl of the Valley dies!"

A stern, fierce light gleamed from the eyes of Seven-Plumes. For a moment, the tableau was striking in the extreme. The grim, threatening figure of the Indian, the firm yet sullen face of Carlota, and the earnest, apprehensive, and imploring expression of Madge—all conspired to render the scene an uncommon one. The dog gazed inquiringly at his mistress.

"Be quiet, sir—be quiet!" commanded Madge; and Calamity maintained his neutral position.

The young woman glided forward and took the hand of Seven-Plumes.

"Do not harm her, chief!" she cried; "for she acts but in accordance with the nature the Great Spirit has given her. when she refuses to accompany you. Be brave, be generous! and for the good service I have rendered you, give me her freedom. I ask it as a reward!"

"The woman of the Valley hates you," replied Seven-Plumes, scanning the features of Madge with curiosity.

"I care not—I care not! I would save her from a fate she so much dreads. Our ways will be different, and she will have no power to do me wrong."

The Indian looked at Carlota, then at Madge; and it was evident that his purpose wavered.

"You yield—you yield! I thank you, chief. Carlota, he gives you freedom!"

Carlota did not speak; her bosom was heaving with agitation, and her eyes were downcast.

"The Flower of the Mountains has asked much; but the chief of the Blackfeet gives it. The girl of the Valley is free; the soft voice has prevailed."

There was a conflict in the breast of the Indian: his better nature struggling with his baser.

"Seven-Plumes will go to his young men with heaviness," he added; "but he will smooth his face and deceive their eyes, so that they shall not know the Blackfoot has been sad. Go! Seven-Plumes is a warrior."

"Thanks, brave chief! Your name shall be mentioned with honor among the pale-faces," answered Madge, with fervor.

Seven-Plumes turned on his heel and walked

away.

Carlota stood a moment irresolute, trembling and agitated—then cast herself into the arms of Madge, sobbing. Hot tears coursed down her cheeks. Madge put her arms around her, and held her in a gentle embrace. She was silent at first, and allowed the pent-up feelings of the girl to exhaust their violence in weeping.

She gradually dried her tears, and disengaged herself from the arms of Madge.

"Let us go," she said, in a low voice.

"Whither?" Madge asked.

"To the Valley. Let us hasten," Carlota answered, hurriedly.

"No—not there—not there!" cried Madge.

"Calm your fears. The Valley shall be to you as all other places; you shall pass through it harmless. We must hurry to Nick Whiffles; he is starving. I am full of remorse!"

Madge hesitated no longer; she held out her hand to Carlota.

"Heaven be praised! You no longer hate me!" she said.

"You have nothing to fear from me. But speak not of him. Let the name of Pathway remain unmentioned between us. Steel, when it is heated, yields to the blows of the hammer; but when it hardens, it is unyielding, and returns to its former unimpressibility," Carlota replied.

Even as she spoke, shame, disappointment, flushed her cheek.

"I forego vindictiveness and revenge," she went on; "but I cannot forget my disappointment. Prudence," she added, with trembling voice, "admonishes us that there is a point we must not approach."

"You refer to the gray hunter as if he were much to me and nothing to you. Who knows what emotions the fair and fearless girl of Trapper Valley may have awakened in his breast?"

Madge uttered these words in a faltering voice, as if her heart reproached her tongue for words the hollowness of which none realized more than she.

"No more, girl!" she said, plaintively. "You but deepen the wound you would heal. Disguise it not—at least attempt it not—you and the hunter in gray have met before, at Red River settlement, or some of the settlements on the Columbia. You will not—you cannot deny it!"

Madge was confused—neither denying nor assenting to this.

"I see it in your conscious cheeks. Tell me where."

"At the mission, near Astoria," returned Madge, reluctantly.

Carlota breathed hard, and pressed her hand convulsively to her heart.

"I saw him almost daily," Madge continued, "until the mission was destroyed by wicked and abandoned men. At the time of that terrible visitation, he was away. We had parted, as we believed, forever."

"I comprehend," said Carlota, quickly. "You differed, doubtless, on religious matters. You believed, perhaps, that you could be the means of converting savages; and, while young and beautiful, had sufficient courage and virtue to sever yourself from the great world, to lead a life of privation and usefulness. He told his love; and you, exulting in your self-denial, and rapt with visionary dreams, cast the chalice of happiness to the ground. The world had no more to offer him, and he fled to the northern trapping-grounds, hoping in peril and excitement to forget the cause of his unhappiness. Bitterly has your folly been punished. Little did you imagine that the boon he asked so humbly was to be forced from you by the rough hand of the mountaineer."

The two girls moved onward, side by side, both much affected.

"You knew, then, that I was dragged hither—that I was a captive—that those wild men clamored for me, as the famished wolf for its victim!" exclaimed Madge.

"You do me injustice! Carlota never sank so low as to cater to the appetites of rude and lawless men. I shuddered when I heard the tale. I would have saved you and spared you the horror of Black Rock. But even that was better than what might have happened. The authority of Hendricks was never in such peril as then. He loved you—at least, as much as his hard, stern nature would allow. He was angry that his followers should presume to one that he had set apart for himself; that he had encountered much danger for; that he had

brought with great peril from the distant mission."

"I remember it with horror; the midnight attack; the clashing of steel; the short and sanguinary struggle; the burning of the mission-house; the first moments of captivity; the long and hurried march; the arrival at the Valley; the proposals of the fearful man, Hendricks; the eyes of the men fixed upon me with such dreadful meaning; the weary days of imprisonment; the importunities of the outlaw-leader; his dark hints, and finally, the secret night-march, and the scene at Black Rock. Then came resuscitation following my rescue by Nick, with a haunting terror of half-consciousness, and the slow, dubious recognition of my situation. But anon the honest face of the trapper assured me. The sound of his voice gave me confidence. What a revelation came! How the consciousness of security thrilled my frame. You cannot comprehend the emotions of that moment. It appeared to me that the hand of Providence had interposed. My tears fell on the hands of my benefactor. He has proved himself worthy the full measure of my gratitude. To prevent discovery and its consequences, I threw aside the garments of my sex, and become the boy Sebastian. I was most gently cared for by Nicholas. He took pride and pleasure in me, and great indeed is the debt I owe him. He sent a messenger to the mission, but it was deserted, and my friends were scattered, he knew not where. It was the trapping season, and Nick was busy with his traps. I became his constant companion. He taught me the use of the rifle and the bow, and never was so happy as when I exhibited aptness and skill. Months passed on, and but for the remembrance of friends, and a continual fear of detection by Hendricks, should have been tolerably reconciled to my wandering life. The very thought of the dark mountaineer made me tremble. Imagine, if you can, the feelings that agitated me when I saw the robber-captain enter the camp of Nick Whiffles, disguised as a lost, forlorn, and starving trapper. I could with the greatest difficulty command my emotions. Memory, too, it would seem, was busy in his own brain, for the ruffian—"

"Call him not a ruffian!" cried Carlota, grasping Madge by the wrist. "He is my father! my father!"

Carlota made this announcement as if it cost her indescribable pain.

"It cannot be! I will not believe it!" exclaimed Madge, with an involuntary shiver.

"I was educated at Red River settlement," added Carlota; "that is, I learned to read and write. The Captain of the Mountaineers had charge of me. He came occasionally to see me—to watch my growth and development. I was taught to call him father. He took me from the settlement when quite young, and brought me to the Valley, where gradually I forgot my homesickness, and became accustomed to the lawless manners of the mountaineers, and gained an ascendancy over them. Young natures are impressible and ready to take on the colors and shapes around them. Is it singular, then, that I should have learned to tolerate crime and to regard the community of which I was a member as existing outside the laws and usages of civilized society? I loved authority; I was imperious, and the power to sway and command the lawless trappers pleased my vanity and overcame my scruples. I became what you see me, but I am not the depraved being that you have believed. My influence has always been exerted against acts of cruelty. If dark deeds have been committed, they were perpetrated without my knowledge and sanction."

"The Frenchman's daughter?" said Madge, inquiringly.

"Owes her safety, thus far, to the outlaw's daughter," replied Carlota. "On one pretext and another, I have kept her from outrage—intending, when I could do so with safety, to give her her liberty. My will is not absolute at the Valley. There are certain points with which it is dangerous to meddle."

"You relieve my mind of a terrible burden," answered Madge. "For one like you there is still hope. You are not, you cannot be, entirely lost to goodness and truth. The world must yet have a path that your feet can tread."

"Too late! too late!" sobbed Carlota.

"Do you not doubt the claims of this man Hendricks?" interrogated Madge.

"Of late," replied the girl, "his language has been such as a parent does not address to

a child. I have trembled—I have doubted. I have treated him as I thought my duty, and behold in him a true and only friend. I have tried to reverence and love him; but the effort, in all essential realities, has failed. As I developed into womanhood, his manner changed; but I have gained an ascendancy over his mind that he cannot entirely shake off!"

She stopped; then, with evident effort, continued:

"Accident brought me in contact with the young hunter, and a new and powerful feeling grew into existence. I loved him! This confession gives me pain, but I am forced to make it. I assisted him to escape; I guided him from the Valley. The history of Indian Joe is known to you. You are surprised to hear me express myself so intelligibly, but I know what the world is; for my reputed father has procured me books from the settlements, which I have read with avidity, and treasured with care."

Madge pressed Carlóta's arm sympathetically.

"I no longer fear you," she said. "I see in you a sister, exposed to temptation shaken, but not entirely fallen. Bury the past. Fly with me to the settlements, leaving behind all that now degrades you—bad men, bad examples, demoralizing associations, and habits that detract from your womanhood. Cease to think of Pathaway; I say it for your good, and not to wound."

"'Twas a silly dream!" returned Carlóta, bitterly. "I cast from me the vain hope—I abandon it forever."

"'Tis best so. If there was hope, I would tell you. Your fearless nature excited his admiration, but your associations shock him. Pardon, pardon me, Carlóta; I speak not selfishly, but as a true, true friend. He is noble; he is brave; he is good. I have watched him day by day. If, as the boy Sebastian, I suffered shame and embarrassment, it was not without some reward. I was near him, and once I saved him."

"What happiness!" murmured Carlóta.

"I bear this wound for him," resumed Madge; "and my deportment, I trust, has been such during our late singular companionship, that I shall have nothing to remember with regret. I will not refer particularly to the unexpectedness of his appearance, and the thrilling circumstances under which we met. And now, Carlóta, I have done. The name of the gray hunter shall not again, in your hearing, pass the portals of my lips, to give you pain."

A slight tremor shook the person of Carlóta. Presently, she grew calm. They followed the guidance of the dog, and conversed in a friendly way; but the name of Pathaway was spoken no more.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

FINALE.

It was near the middle of the afternoon when Madge and Carlóta neared Trapper Valley. They had made what speed they could, but were necessarily faint from long fasting, and wearied by toiling over the rough and sometimes intricate way. The thought of the supposed danger of Nick was a sufficient incentive to urge them onward.

"Trapper Valley is at the right," said Carlóta. "We will descend to it by a passage known only to Hendricks and a few of his trusty followers."

Madge trembled.

"Shrink not," added Carlóta; "I will screen you from harm. Even Hendricks shall respect you, if we meet him, and yield to my present mood. Tread carefully, and grasp firmly the bushes as you go down; for the descent is steep, and perilous to careless feet."

Carlóta approached a spot where the Valley fell off abruptly. To a casual eye there was no practicable method of descending. Putting aside a mass of vines, the girl of the mountains unmasked a deep gulch—which, starting several yards from the sharp angle of the declivity, offered a pathway far less dangerous, though attended with sufficient difficulty to require all the strength and firmness of Madge; but imitating the example of her conductress, she finally conquered the obstacles before her, reaching the Valley with bruised feet and lacerated hands.

"Trapper-Trace," said Carlóta, as they paused to breathe a moment, pointing to the east, "is in that direction. The Boiling Spring

and the Mountain Gate are to the west."

Carlóta hurried forward and soon entered a wood. In a short time they came to a spot where the ground was trodden hard by the feet of a horse, while the grass was eaten to the earth and the foliage cropped closely. Madge immediately recalled the peril of Portneuf. Carlóta perceived the agitation consequent upon this discovery. Madge turned her pale face on her guide with an expression that could not be misunderstood.

"I knew it not! I knew it not!" said Carlóta, with a flush of anger. "'Twas a wanton act, and committed without my knowledge. Brace confessed it to me last night, when he perceived that his end was near."

"It was cruel, cruel!" said Madge.

"They are wretches!" cried Carlóta, indignantly. "Poor Portneuf! he shall have his daughter."

The girl of the Valley walked onward, with strong displeasure depicted upon her countenance. A sudden cry from her caused Madge to look up. A short distance from them stood a grizzly bear upon his hind feet.

"A bear! a bear!" exclaimed Carlóta. "Of all wild animals, I hold the bear in the greatest dread."

Madge did not retreat; but placing herself before Carlóta, who shrank trembling from the beast, regarded it earnestly. She imagined she could see some resemblance in the animal to the tame bear of the Shoshoné.

"This creature does not appear to be ferocious," she said. "I believe we have nothing to fear from it."

"But he obstructs our passage—how can we reach Nick? You feared me yesterday more than you seem to fear this savage beast."

"A thousand times more! Remain quiet and observe the animal."

"Woman of the Rock," said the bear, "the eyes of the Shoshoné are glad to see you."

"What! does the creature talk?"

"Listen," replied Madge.

"A cloud hangs over the dwelling of the Thunder-Spirit," resumed the bear. "It is black and heavy, and charged with fire and smoke. The lightning will dart from east to west and from north to south. The Valley will be shaken, and the war-cry of the Shoshoné shall roll through it."

The bearskin sank to the ground, and the well-known features of Multnomah gladdened the eyes of Madge. Unslung the short rifle that was fastened at his side, he swung it over his head, and shouted the war-whoop of his people. Instantly a hundred voices answered the signal from rock and tree and bush: every covert had a cry. Then there was a rattling volley from rifles, carbines, and pistols.

"My warriors are here. I go to lead them against the bad pale-faces of the Valley," said the Shoshoné.

Multnomah bounded from the spot, and was soon heard cheering his warriors to the fight, leaving Carlóta and Madge surprised and bewildered.

The combat went on at different quarters, but came nearer and nearer.

"I hear Hendricks," whispered Carlóta. "He is raging and fighting like a lion!"

"Heaven help the right!" murmured Madge.

Several bullets dropped near them. Calamity walked, growling, around his mistress; and presently the dog Smuggler came bounding to her side with strong demonstrations of joy.

"The mountaineers are losing ground," said Carlóta. "The conflict comes this way."

"Let us conceal ourselves," suggested Madge.

"For my own safety I care not; but you I will shield to the extent of my power."

The two young women were deliberating which way to fly, when Hendricks, panting, covered with dust, grim with powder and smoke, and bleeding from several wounds, appeared. The sight of Madge and Carlóta was evidently unexpected. He gazed wildly from one to the other.

"Traitor!" he exclaimed, fixing his flashing eyes upon Carlóta; "you have betrayed us. The Shoshoné devils swarm the Valley; and it goes hard with our men, who are pushed on every side."

In his right hand the robber-captain held a pistol, which trembled, as if with impatience, in his nervous grasp.

"Say what you will, Richard Hendricks—you cannot wound me more. There is that which rankles deeper here"—she laid her

hand on her bosom—"than pistol-ball or steel can penetrate. But spare this girl!"

Hendricks turned his fierce eyes upon Madge.

"Who are you?" he demanded, gruffly.

Madge put back her hair, giving the mountaineer a full view of her features.

"Look at me, miscreant, and recall the face of Una, of the Old Mission!"

The outlaw recoiled, and a sickly pallor overspread his visage.

"Do the dead come back?" he muttered.

"Away! away!—come not too near!"

For an instant the shouts and the clamor of battle fell unheeded upon Hendricks' ear. In spirit he was at Black Rock, and saw the lighted torches, the pale, pleading face, and white arms waving in the air.

"This is a foul lie!" he said, presently. "It is only a resemblance—a terrible similitude of what *was*, but will never again be. Begone, witch! You unnerve an arm that must must wave the longest and bloodiest in the fight."

A clear voice rang through the wood. Madge's heart leaped with hope.

"Give in—give up, you white renegades, or I'll make a prison difficulty among ye!"

It was Nick Whiffles, surely. No one who had heard them could mistake those tones.

"The spyin' scoundrel!" growled Hendricks. "But I'll soon meet him, wounded as I am, and the critter shall feel that mine is no feeble arm. My men give back. Cowards! cowards! they miss my voice in a moment. At them, boys—at them!"

The mountaineer shouted the concluding order with startling vehemence. He pointed his pistol at Carlóta.

"Father—"

"I am not your father!" interrupted the outlaw, with bitter energy. "That for her who betrays me!"

He discharged the weapon, and Carlóta sank slowly upon the breast of Madge.

"Oh, Carlóta, Carlóta, he has killed you!" shrieked Madge. Then to the mountaineer: "Know, base man, that this unfortunate girl has been true to you and your men. We have but recently escaped from the captivity of Seven-Plumes, and were as much amazed at this attack as you could have been."

Hendricks darted an inquiring look at Carlóta.

"She speaks truly," murmured the latter, faintly. "I die guiltless of that with which you charge me."

At that moment the outlaws were seen flying in various directions. Hendricks called loudly upon them to return, but they were deaf alike to threats and appeals.

"You'd oughter run in that way, I allow, long ago, by mighty!" cried Whiffles; and immediately after, the report of his rifle was heard. The mountaineer stood irresolute, looking from Carlóta to Madge, and from Madge to Carlóta. Disappointment, rage, remorse, with lingering tenderness for the girl Carlóta, held him in suspense.

The savage warriors rolled on after the retreating foe. There was an incessant explosion of fire-arms, and the whoops of the red victors shook the forest.

A manly figure sprang between Hendricks and the girls. It was Pathaway. A faint cry from the dying Carlóta attested the sincerity of her love, and the power that the young man unconsciously exerted over her.

"'Tis he! 'tis he!" she gasped, in tones scarcely audible.

The gray hunter's arm was raised—a pistol was fired. Hendricks stood motionless a few seconds, then fell to the ground like an oak, the last fibre of which has been severed by the unsparing axe.

"Carlóta," he articulated, painfully, "you are avenged. Dick Hendricks has fought his last battle with red man or white. It is all over—clean played out, life is. I am off for darkness in double quick time. A greater Captain than I gives the order. I have lived recklessly, and I'll die so. No cant, no sentimental whinin' for Dick Hendricks."

The agony of his death-wound choked his utterance for an instant.

"Carlóta—," he added, anon, "we shall go together. But I'm sorry I raised my hand ag'in ye. I took care of ye, and loved ye; but you was no darter o' mine. I might done better by ye, but the impulse to do it wasn't born in me. Good—good—by, gal! Good-by, world, and all that's in it. 'Tis too—too late for sorrow—too—too late for—for—" The outlaw's head sank low upon the turf, and

he added, feebly, "for vengeance!" expressing his last thought with his last breath.

Carlota stretched out her hand to Pathaway. He knelt beside her, and took it into his own. She gazed at him earnestly. A calm, almost happy expression lighted up her features. She did not speak—she could not, but a smile of inexpressible meaning flitted faintly across her lips. Her eyes fixed, and the spirit of Carlota passed from its fair tenement.

No additional light was ever thrown upon her parentage and history. Her grave was hollowed in the Valley, and Madge shed tears upon it—which was the only tribute paid by affection.

The first thought of Porneuf and Jeanjean, when the outlaws fled, was to look for Ninon. The search was successful, and she was restored unharmed to both father and lover. It was a joyful occasion for those in whom the reader is interested, though the melancholy fate of Carlota affected the spirits of Madge for a long time.

On the following day, a happy party set out for the nearest settlement. Pathaway no longer called the young woman Madge, but Una, for there had been a full explanation of those matters and mysteries already understood by the reader; and thus the young man recovered the woman that he had believed lost to him forever.

"The p'isonest diffikilties come to an eend at last," moralized Nick. "I've had my share of 'em, I allow; but allers come out right in the course of time. Come on, Humbug, for you was a humbug, little 'un, all the time you was a boy—and keep closer to uncle Nick. There'll be a weddin', I s'pose, down in the clearin's. There allers is weddin's when boys and gals git together. But there's been no weddin's for me. Oh Lord, no! We shall all be in the p'ison newspapers arter this comes off, I s'pose," quoth Nick, musingly. "No way to stop the papers from printin' things, is there, Colonel? Jes' so; I thought not. Look out, Calamity! Don't snub Smuggler in that way. Well, Shoshone—to Multnomah, who made one of the party, 'not stanin' the difference in white and red natur', I must say that you're one to be depended on. I never seed Ingins fight better nor your'n, when we whipped them pesky free-trapper robbers. There won't be so many traps took, nor lives neither, arter this. Red-skin, I thank ye hearty and kind, and if the good will of Nick Whiffles is worth anything, you're welcome to it. Andrew Jeanjean, my lad, can't you sing us the 'Trapper's Darter'? No diffikilty about your head, eh? No blushin' there, Nanny, for he couldn't forgit ye when he'd forgot everything else, his wits not excepted. He's been true to ye in his senses and out, under ground and atop on't. I'll sing you a varse that he used to sing about your voice, and eyes, and smiles, and sich, when I'm clear on the high notes. Colonel, you're ruther close to my boy. Talkin' it all over, I allow. Sparrer-legs—beg your pardon," said Nick, apologetically, "gal, I mean, it rejoices my heart to see you look so bright and happy."

Madge gave her hand to Nick.

"It's a right small hand and a good one for a young man to own," said Nick, admiringly. "Take good care on her, Colonel. She's as dear to me as my rifle, and my dogs, and the perairies, and the air that I love. Keep every diffikilty from her pooty head, and when you're happy in the distant clearin's, as I know you will be, sometimes think o' Nick Whiffles, the old trapper of the Nor'west."

He kissed the little hand, and sighed as he relinquished it.

"Are you happy, Nicholas?" asked Madge.

There was a slight quivering of the trapper's lips.

"There's a little diffikilty here," he said, laying his finger upon his heart; "but it won't last forever. Oh Lord, no!"

Nick was absent-minded and sad a short time; but brightening up, presently, told stories of his grandfather and other members of the Whiffles family, in his usual whimsical manner.

"I hope they'll be happy," said the trapper, the day after the marriage, or rather double marriage, for Ninon and Jeanjean were united at the same time, "and that there'll never be any condemned little diffikilties atween 'em. I shall miss the little 'un woundedly. And the dogs, too, for that matter, for Sebastian understood the natur' o' dogs and animiles, and was kind to 'em, as he was to every thing else. And now, Nick Whiffles," he added, addressing himself, "go back ag'in to the great Trappin' Grounds of the Nor'west, for the air is good there and suits one better nor it does here. The clearin's won't do for Nick Whiffles. Oh, Lord, no!"

Before daylight the next morning, Nick and the Shoshone were on their way to the Northern Trapping-Grounds.

THE END.

A Florida boy has succeeded, in some inextensible way, in so far taming an alligator that comes to the pier at his call and takes food of his hand. Some cloudy morning it may be the Florida boy too.

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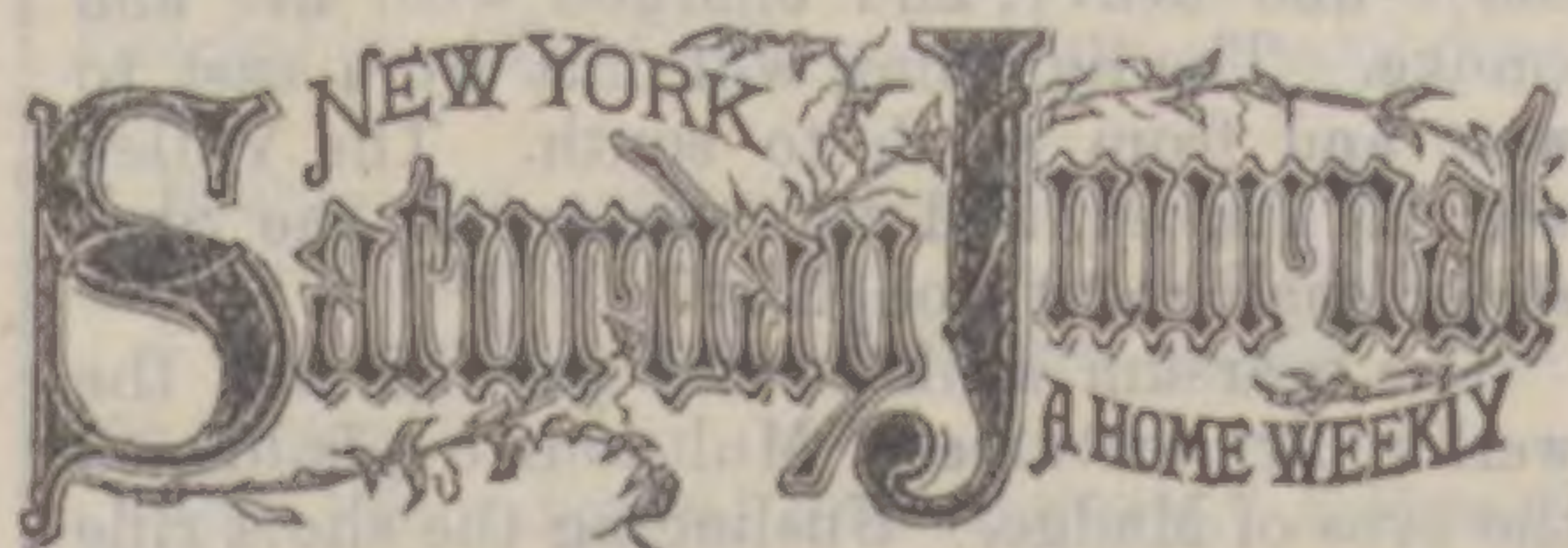
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